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SENIOR PASTOR SUCCESSION IN MULTISITE CHURCHES:  
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Hans Christopher Googer  
May 2018

**APPROVAL SHEET**

SENIOR PASTOR SUCCESSION IN MULTISITE CHURCHES:  
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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To Courtney, Ethan, Asher, and Abram.

You are the best parts of my earthly life.

And to my mother, who joined the Lord Jesus before seeing this moment,  
but likely knew prior to anyone that it would come.

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## PREFACE

My journey into Ph.D. studies began long ago. My mentor since I was 19, friend, and co-laborer, Kevin McKee, has always encouraged me to pursue further schooling. Kevin sees in me a skillset that I rarely see in myself, and I am grateful for his steady hand and regular encouragement in tackling this project. His leadership in my life over the past four years has kept me going. Thank you, brother.

Anyone who does a Ph.D. in a modular format (while working full-time, with a family) knows that the degree is not a solo effort. It takes a small village to put one person through such a Ph.D. program. My church, The Chapel, allowed me numerous opportunities to take the necessary time away from the office to read, take classes, and keep working through these studies. Along with that, I had an entire group of people that I regularly updated with my progress—friends, family, and church members. Many of these people sacrificed financially for me, and all of them labored in prayer to see me through—semester by semester. The email updates I sent throughout my studies now number into the forties, and these gracious folks would read them, pray for me, and always ask me how I was doing.

Among this great group of supporters stand four who are incredibly special to me—Courtney, Ethan, Asher, and Abram. None of this work would be possible if not for Courtney. She has consistently had a “whatever it takes” attitude about my schooling. When I was gone two weeks in December, she handled it. When I missed a piano recital, she FaceTimed me in. When I said, “Oh, by the way, I’ll be busy all weekend writing. Can you take the boys to your parents’ house?” she would. Road trips would often involve hours of editing papers (many of the pages contained herein), and she never—not one time—communicated *any* type of frustration to me about the burden I placed upon

her. Her mom, Marie (better known as Mimi), would step in when she could and give support—and she supported a lot. Our boys—Ethan, Asher, and Abram—will have fond memories of Kentucky trips and times at the Kentucky Science Center, and I am grateful for every moment. These boys are probably the *only* ones who are sad that I am finishing the program, because they loved our occasional trips to Louisville. Hopefully my ability to be more present now that the degree is behind me will comfort them, but I doubt it will because I'm not Louisville.

Another supporter, perhaps my biggest one, now stands with the great cloud of witnesses. My mother, Jan Googer, died on June 2, 2017. This day was also the day of my written comprehensive exams. I assume it was because mom had a knack for making personal milestones memorable. She will not be present to see me graduate—something I had envisioned her doing for years now—but she was likely the biggest fan I have ever had. I am grateful for the moments I had with her.

Dr. Gregg Allison became much more than an advisor—he became a friend. Our hours of dinner at Simply Thai kept me motivated. He took me into his home. He shared not just his knowledge with me—but his life. His enthusiasm is contagious. I cannot imagine a better advisor and long to be more like him. Dr. Anthony Foster stepped in to give support with research design, and I am forever grateful. But I am sure he is glad to stop getting my long lists of questions. Dr. Michael Wilder always made time for me and pushed me to make this project the best that I could. These three men have left an indelible mark on me.

The program introduced me to life-long friends. Jamus Edwards went before me, showed me the ropes, and has remained a constant support. Danny Hinton always made time for me and even invited me to join him in ministry when I was able. Mark Brown was yet another mentor and kept me focused on the main goal—becoming more like Jesus. Michael Wilburn has continued to keep me sharp and made me a better pastor. Steve Hudson brought levity and discipline to this project; he also challenged me to make

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If I continued, I could fill every page of this dissertation with my gratitude. Simply put, this could not have been done but through the grace of God, the church that stood with me, and the friends I have gained along the way. I am humbled and grateful.

Hans Googer

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

May 2018

## CHAPTER 1

### LOOKING AT THE FUTURE OF MULTISITE

Churches in North America have undergone significant changes in the last 65 years of ministry—and the addition of multisite churches to the landscape is one of the largest.<sup>1</sup> The widely-understood definition of a multisite church is “one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.”<sup>2</sup> While different catalysts exist<sup>3</sup> for the proliferation of multisite churches, Brian Frye, National Collegiate Strategist for the North American Mission Board, summarized these into three categories: “(1) economic advancement, (2) accelerated mobility, and (3) technological innovation.”<sup>4</sup> The wave of changes in a post-World War II society has created a reality where multisite

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<sup>1</sup>The number 65 comes from Brian Nathaniel Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 63-93. Frye, in one of the first dissertations on multisite churches, notes that multisite churches “did not begin until the latter half of the twenty-first century, and that the origin of the multi-site church movement is attributable to societal changes that took place following World War II.” Ibid., 63.

<sup>2</sup>Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 18.

<sup>3</sup>In his investigation of multisite churches and their historicity, John Hammett, Professor of Systematic Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, finds three catalysts similar to Frye’s: “communication, transportation, and technology.” John Hammett, “Have We Ever Seen This Before? Multi-Site Precedents,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 28, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>. In their foundational work on multisite churches, Surratt, Ligon, and Bird recognize that the “digital technologies, combined with the growing social acceptance of branch-church ideas, have made a new movement [multisite] possible today.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 91.

<sup>4</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon,” 66.



churches are considered by some to be the “new normal” for the church landscape.<sup>5</sup> This means that multisite churches are a part of church life in North America for the foreseeable future.<sup>6</sup> In fact, experts estimate that there are now more than 8,000 multisite churches in the United States (by broadest definitions)<sup>7</sup> and over 5,000 with multiple locations.<sup>8</sup>

However, even if multisite churches number in the thousands and attendance numbers in the millions, the conversation as to their effectiveness, healthiness, and even whether they are an actual church marches forward. Many critics of multisite exist, questioning if the model fits within the confines of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> In response, theologians

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<sup>5</sup>Ed Stetzer, “Multisite Evolution,” *The Exchange*, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/june/multisite-evolution.html>.

<sup>6</sup>The phrase “multisite church” often brings a specific model to one’s mind. However, for the sake of this dissertation, no specific model/taxonomy was considered. Rather, the multiple models and types of multisite churches are considered. Time will likely tell which models are *most* beneficial for discipleship.

<sup>7</sup>Warren Bird, “Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard: Faster Growth, More New Believers and Greater Lay Participation,” Leadership Network, 2014, 3, accessed July 15, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014\\_LN\\_Generis\\_Multisite\\_Church\\_Scorecard\\_Report\\_v2.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014_LN_Generis_Multisite_Church_Scorecard_Report_v2.pdf). The broadest definitions include churches that have multiple worship venues meeting on the same campus.

<sup>8</sup>Warren Bird, “Big News-Multisite Churches Now Number More than 5,000,” *Leadership Network*, accessed November 1, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/big\\_news\\_multisite\\_churches\\_now\\_number\\_more\\_than\\_5000/](http://leadnet.org/big_news_multisite_churches_now_number_more_than_5000/).

<sup>9</sup>Recent research has critiqued the multisite model on biblical, theological, and ecclesiological fronts. See Darrell Grant Gaines, “One Church in One Location: Questioning the Biblical, Theological, and Historical Claims of the Multi-Site Church Movement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); Patrick Graham Willis, “Multi-Site Churches and Their Undergirding Ecclesiology: Questioning Its Baptist Identity and Biblical Validity” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). Along with those criticisms, other pastors have found the multisite model lacking. See Grant Gaines, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site: Disassembling the Church?” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 33-37, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://grantgaines.net/2014/09/30/assembly-is-essential-too-a-response-to-j-d-greear/>; Bobby Jamieson, “Historical Critique of Multi-Site: Not Over My Dead Body,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 46-48, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>; Thomas White, “Nine Reasons Why I Don’t Like Multi-Site Churches, From a Guy Who Should,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 49-51, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>.

and practitioners have written their rebuttals.<sup>10</sup> In fact, many of the proponents are also practitioners.<sup>11</sup> While it is fair to critique the model, such critique usually focuses on whether or not a multisite church is indeed a church. For the research herein, the argument of whether or not a multisite church is indeed a church is not developed, as many have already discussed this issue.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

What demands investigation at this juncture is not whether or not multisite churches are true churches but how to navigate the reality that looms for all multisite churches—pastoral succession. Many multisite churches are still led by their founding pastors (or the pastors that led them to a multisite model),<sup>12</sup> and Leadership Network found that “the typical multisite church is just 4 years into the process.”<sup>13</sup> With thousands of multisite churches and millions in attendance, understanding the nature of pastoral transitions within the structure becomes incredibly important.

One aspect of multisite churches is that they are often associated with the people

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<sup>10</sup>Gregg R. Allison, “Theological Defense of Multisite,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 8-18, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>; J. D. Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 19-24, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup>See Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation* (Nashville: B & H and Lifeway Research, 2009); Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*; Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012); Jim Tomberlin and Tim Cool, *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings, in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church World* (Nashville: Rainer, 2014).

<sup>12</sup>Willow Creek (though their succession will take place in late 2018) and Community Christian Church in the Chicago area; Elevation Church in the Carolinas; North Point in Atlanta; North Coast Church in Vista, CA; Grace Chapel in Lexington, MA; Houston’s First Baptist in Texas; and CrossPoint throughout Kansas. These churches utilize different models for multisite (live teaching, team teaching, video-based, etc.), but are still under the direction of the leader who brought them to a multisite model.

<sup>13</sup>Bird, “Multisite Church Scorecard,” 4.

who founded them or led them to multisite. The name of the church and the pastor of that church go hand in hand—Larry Osborne at North Coast, Rick Warren at Saddleback, Bill Hybels at Willow, Matt Chandler at The Village, Craig Groeschel at Life Church, Andy Stanley at North Point, or the Fergusons at Community Christian. What happens when these gifted and charismatic leaders come to the end of their leadership? What are the implications for the flock in such instances?

In their study of pastoral succession, William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird write,

Our present models of succession create lots of problems. Too many high-capacity leaders are waiting, perhaps even already named as the potential successor, but with no date given and no clarity on how succession might unfold. Too many older pastors are being forced or thrown out without proper care and honor. Most importantly, *too many churches flounder and lose momentum simply because a church's leadership failed to anticipate and begin planning for one of their most important responsibilities.*<sup>14</sup>

Pastoral succession can be difficult. Bob Russell, who led a successful succession of the large, single-site Southeast Christian Church<sup>15</sup> notes, “The ability/inability to pass the baton successfully determines the ongoing success of the organization and the leader’s legacy.”<sup>16</sup> Still, succession is heart-wrenching work. Bill Hybels, who is working on his succession plan at the time of this writing, shared honestly at his Global Leadership Summit about how difficult it is to think about his own transition from the church he founded.<sup>17</sup> Pastors who give their lives to a flock can have a difficult time considering what is next. Bird and Vanderbloemen write that transitioning

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<sup>14</sup>William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 29, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup>At the time of Russell’s succession, Southeast Christian Church was single-site. It is now a multisite church.

<sup>16</sup>Bob Russell, *Transition Plan* (Louisville: Minister’s Label, 2010), 48.

<sup>17</sup>Alex Murashko, “Bill Hybels Shares Succession Plans at Leadership Summit,” *Christian Post*, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/bill-hybels-shares-succession-plans-at-leadership-summit-79787/>.

founding pastors (which many multisite churches still have) is a difficult task:

Successions from first-generation leaders to second-generation leaders are the least likely to go well. In fact, too often they end up much more like a divorce than a wedding. While the succession from a founder to the next leader should be a culmination of a legacy and a celebration of a new union between new pastor and church (a wedding), the reality is that the outgoing founder is often a bigger part of the problem than the solution. When that happens, too frequently little can be done to avoid the church divorcing either their legacy pastor or their new pastor.<sup>18</sup>

These issues are not just about pastoral succession and how a pastor might finish, but also what happens to Christ's church during the process. At its core, pastoral succession is an issue of the flock of Christ (Acts 20:28). The apostle Peter reminds the elders to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight” (1 Pet 5:2). Leaders *must* consider the state of the flock and help them through changes that come during the tenure of their leaders.

Often, the works on multisite churches focus on *how* the church implements the multisite model. These works are incredibly helpful. Websites like “Inside North Point”<sup>19</sup> help church leaders look under the hood of one of the largest churches in the nation to determine the best practices for hiring, funding, HR policies, and myriad other things. Books like *Exponential* delve into how a church might move to multisite—complete with diagrams of staffing structures based upon the number of campuses a church might have.<sup>20</sup> *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* dedicates eleven of its fifteen chapters to issues of how to execute multisite,<sup>21</sup> and its follow-up book, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*, investigates how different churches across the country are implementing the multisite model.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 79-80.

<sup>19</sup>Inside North Point, accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www.insidenorthpoint.org>.

<sup>20</sup>Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*.

<sup>21</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*. Chapters focus on everything from discerning if God wants a leadership team to pursue multisite all the way to casting the vision, paying for the vision, and leveraging technology to accomplish the move to multisite.

<sup>22</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*.

Along with these practical resources, higher-level research is now being dedicated to how churches approach multisite. For example, Charles Carter focused his attention on how First Baptist Church of Windermere moved to multisite.<sup>23</sup> Christopher Kouba researched “the role of the campus pastor in order to provide Prestonwood Baptist Church and other multisite churches a roadmap for hiring future campus pastors and give future campus pastors a learning map to ensure they achieve success.”<sup>24</sup> Following in this vein, Jamus Edwards studied different leadership typologies for multisite churches.<sup>25</sup> These resources serve the church and contribute to best practices for multisite churches for years to come.

However, the way churches implement their multisite strategy changes regularly. For example, in helping church leaders think about what type of teaching strategy to use, Ferguson writes, “You basically have three choices: video teaching, in-person teaching, or a combination of the two. I am convinced that as long as it is done well, any of these three approaches will work.”<sup>26</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird recognize that “it is important that a multi-site church be structured more like an organism than like an organization; *the structure will have to morph and change rapidly as the dynamics of the new campuses are brought into the picture.*”<sup>27</sup>

Such morphing is demonstrated in churches like The Village Church—a multisite church in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The Village Church began with a goal of

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<sup>23</sup>Charles Timothy Carter, “An Analysis of the Multi-Campus Approach of Local Church Ministry Utilizing First Baptist Church of Windermere, Florida, as a Paradigmatic Model” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

<sup>24</sup>Christopher Barton Kouba, “Role of the Campus Pastor: Responsibilities and Practices in Multisite Churches” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 1.

<sup>25</sup>Jamus Howell Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics in Multisite Churches: A Quantitative Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

<sup>26</sup>Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 160.

<sup>27</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 141, emphasis added.

being a church-planting church but also developed a multisite strategy. The multisite strategy, combined with the desire to be a multiplying movement, led leadership to consider ways they could leverage the multisite model to establish autonomous churches.<sup>28</sup> The leadership of The Village Church writes,

Everything, from the biblical mandate to multiply to the normative life cycle of growth and maturity to the existing platform of multi-site campuses, stirs a growing conviction within the leadership of The Village Church to consider an opportunity unique to multi-site churches. Specifically, we see an opportunity to use the multi-site strategy as a prudent form of church planting and multiplication.<sup>29</sup>

With this information in mind, four observations contribute to the formation of the research problem: (1) many multisite churches are in their first generation, (2) pastoral transitions are significant matters for churches, and (3) much of the multisite literature focuses upon *how* churches “do” multisite within their first generation, but (4) how those churches “do” multisite is constantly evolving. Regardless of the current model or practice of multisite, attention must be given to how these churches intend to transition to a new generation of leadership. Without such attention, the flock of Christ could be harmed, as could those who lead it. Transitioning well is one of the most significant ways pastors can care for their flocks.

### **Research Purpose**

This mixed-methods study unfolded in two phases. First, it investigated how multisite churches transitioned from the founding pastor’s generation (or the pastor who led the church to multiple sites) to the second generation of pastoral leadership. This was

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<sup>28</sup>The Village Church’s multisite model will cease by 2022, and each campus will become an autonomous church. The Village Church, “Multiply,” accessed October 16, 2017, <http://multiply.thevillagechurch.net>.

<sup>29</sup>The Village Church, “Campus Transitions: Vision, Rationale and Responses,” accessed September 23, 2014, [http://thevillagechurch.net/mediafiles/uploaded/c/0e2769955\\_1389036487\\_campus-transitions-document.pdf](http://thevillagechurch.net/mediafiles/uploaded/c/0e2769955_1389036487_campus-transitions-document.pdf). Further info on this process can be found by researching William Beau Hughes, “Preparing and Transitioning a Multi-Site Campus to a Local Church at the Village Church in Denton, Texas” (D.Ed.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016); and Joshua Rice Patterson, “Leveraging the Multi-Site Church Approach as a Long-Term Church Planting Strategy at the Village Church in Dallas-Fort Worth” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

called generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession. This phase consisted of a survey given to all consenting multisite churches that have gone through generation 1 to generation 2 succession. The second phase utilized a Delphi panel in order to forecast best practices of multisite pastoral succession. Thus, phase 1 looked back, categorizing what *had* happened, and phase 2 sought what *should* happen.

The ultimate purpose of this research was to help multisite churches (or churches that are considering multisite) better understand and implement pastoral succession. With numerous multisite churches entering a season of pastoral transition in the next eight to ten years,<sup>30</sup> learning from those who have gone before (regardless of the success or failure of the succession) will likely prove beneficial—especially within a model of church that is still relatively new. Further, with multiple models of multisite ministry, specific models may be easier to transition.<sup>31</sup> Knowing this can serve churches moving forward that might be considering multisite as a way to fulfill their mission.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions shaped the direction of the study.

1. How do multisite church leaders report their succession process from generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession?
2. How does multisite organizational structure influence pastoral succession strategy?
3. What aspects of the inherited multisite church remained after succession?
4. What lessons have multisite leaders who have completed the succession process learned?
5. What do experts in multisite pastoral succession believe are the best practices of a succession plan for multisite churches?

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<sup>30</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 192, found that the average age of a pastor of one of the top 100 largest churches in the United States is fifty-five.

<sup>31</sup>For broad taxonomic structures for multisite, see Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics,” 130-44; Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon,” 179. These structures were used to help understand and develop protocol for RQ2.

## Delimitations of the Study

This study had two large areas of delimitation—in the population for phase 1 and the selection of the panel for phase 2. Regarding phase 1, delimitation revolved around the selection of churches. Because the majority of multisite churches within the United States are still in their first generation, a relatively small number of churches qualify for study. Phase 1's delimitations were as follows:

1. This study focused on the succession of the senior leader of the church. Though other key leaders in multisite churches might go through a succession process, the senior leader's succession is essential for the health of the church.
2. The church must have made its succession from the pastor who led them into multisite—the generation 1 pastor. Further, the church had to have remained multisite at the time of succession.<sup>32</sup>
3. Transitions due to death, firing, or abrupt or forced resignation were not considered. These added too many variables to the study.<sup>33</sup>

Phase 2's delimitation focused largely on the participants within the Delphi panel. The Delphi panel for phase 2 of the study was a homogenous sample—with participants all being involved in multisite churches during their succession process. Specifically, these participants must have been any one of the following: (1) the generation 1 pastor of a multisite church having undergone pastoral succession, (2) the

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<sup>32</sup>Thus, studying churches such as The Village Church or Redeemer Presbyterian was outside of the scope of this study.

<sup>33</sup>At the time of this writing, the complete dissolution of Mars Hill at the end of 2014 rings loudly in the ears of multisite thinkers and leaders. After a series of confrontations between senior leadership and founding pastor Mark Driscoll, Driscoll abruptly resigned on October 14, 2014. See Kate Shellnutt and Morgan Lee, "Mark Driscoll Resigns from Mars Hill," *Christianity Today*, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october-web-only/mark-driscoll-resigns-from-mars-hill.html>. The leadership of Mars Hill decided that rather than transition to new leadership, the best future for Mars Hill was no future at all. Shortly after Driscoll's resignation, Mars Hill leadership communicated that they would dissolve as an organization, and campuses were given the option of becoming their own autonomous church, closing their doors, or merging with another church. Eleven autonomous churches came as a result. See Morgan Lee, "Goodbye, Mars Hill: Mark Driscoll's Multisite Empire Will Sell Properties and Dissolve," *ChristianityToday.com*, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/october/goodbye-mars-hill-multisite-church-dissolve-mark-driscoll.html>. Another example of a sudden departure happened with Darrin Patrick of The Journey Church in St. Louis. Patrick was a prominent voice on church planting and the necessity of strong male leadership within the church. However, in April 2016, church elders found "allegations of pastoral misconduct" and, after investigation, confirmed Patrick was acting in a way unbecoming of a pastor.



generation 2 pastor of a multisite church, (3) a governing board or senior leadership team member of a multisite church that was a part of that church's succession process, or (4) someone who has consulted multisite churches through the pastoral succession process.

### **Research Assumptions**

The following research assumptions formed my perspective in this research.

1. Multisite churches are going to be part of the landscape of the North American church for the foreseeable future.
2. The multisite church is a tenable model of church life.
3. Pastoral succession is a necessary and important part of church health and longevity.
4. Pastoral successions are the responsibility of the leadership of any given local church.
5. The senior leader is a key player in multisite churches and their successions.
6. Multisite successions are often more difficult because of the complexity of the multisite structure, the organizational structures that exist within multisite churches, and the role of the senior leader within multisite.

### **Research Overview**

These research questions can be answered by a two-phase sequential mixed methods study. Mixed methods research combines both quantitative and qualitative data in order to develop a fuller picture of a research problem. Further, Creswell and Plano Clark note that the “central premise” of mixed methods research “is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.”<sup>34</sup> When investigating multisite pastoral succession, some items are quantitative (number of campuses, baptisms, offering, attendance, etc.) and others are qualitative (personal evaluation of the succession process, experts' opinions on best practices, etc.). Both of these elements contribute to the

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<sup>34</sup>John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 5.

succession landscape and were utilized in this research. Phase 1 sought to answer research questions 1-4, and phase 2 sought to answer research question 5.<sup>35</sup>

### **Phase 1: Survey Data**

Phase 1 aimed to generate a snapshot of multisite churches that have undergone the pastoral succession process. This survey purposefully looked *back* at completed succession processes to see what had been done. The survey—developed with the aid of an expert panel—was administered to every known and qualifying multisite church that consented to the study. Phase 1 developed in three steps.

Step 1 discovered the survey population and finalized the survey content. The ultimate aim of the study was to find *all* multisite churches that have undergone generation 1 to generation 2 succession. However, discovering an accurate and identifiable list was difficult. Thus, to build the most robust list possible, all reasonable means were utilized to discover these churches. Multisite churches are often independent, thus it is unnecessary that they report number of campuses, who their pastor is, etc. Hence, this research utilized both internet searching and snowball sampling in order to make every effort to exhaust the population until no further examples could be found.

Survey finalization happened concurrently to population discovery. An expert panel (this panel is different from the Delphi panel for phase 2) was utilized to give feedback on the Multisite Pastor Succession Survey.<sup>36</sup> This survey sought to discover elements leading up to succession, the succession process itself, as well as pre- and post-succession metrics. After one round of expert feedback, revisions were made and sent back to the panelists for any further feedback. After hearing back from experts in the

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<sup>35</sup>See chap. 3 for a full explanation of the research design.

<sup>36</sup>See appendix 2.

second round, the survey was field-tested and a further round of revisions were made upon feedback.<sup>37</sup>

Step 2 commenced with the concurrent processes of church participant contact and survey administration. Each church within the population was contacted and asked to participate in the survey—filling out the Dissertation Study Participation Form<sup>38</sup> to consent to the study. Following church consent, the survey was administered to one of the following people: (1) the generation 1 pastor, (2) the generation 2 pastor, (3) senior pastoral staff who were part of the succession process, or (4) governing board members who were part of the succession process. Step 2 concluded after every church within the discovered population had been contacted and those that showed interest in the study consented and, in most instances, completed the survey.

Step 3 involved data analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative information in order to more fully understand succession within multisite churches. The data was first tabulated and presented to give the most significant information about the succession process (number of campuses before and after succession, percentage of churches undergoing internal vs. external succession, length of succession process, etc.). Then, t-test analysis was run on longitudinal metric data to determine if any significance existed between pre- and post-succession giving, baptism, and attendance. Further, certain survey responses were compared to one another and cross-tabulated to try and understand how certain variables might have affected succession strategy. Finally, the open-ended

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<sup>37</sup>Consensus for experts in phase 1's survey design was defined as 70 percent of the panelists agreeing to the necessity of any survey item. Further, field testing a survey on such a small population could remove valuable data from the final version of the survey. So that no potential churches had to be removed from the study after the field test, I chose to give the field test version to a group of pastors who worked at or researched multisite churches. I asked these respondents to fill out the survey hypothetically—letting me know of questions that were unclear, formatting that prevented quick understanding, and the general format and execution of the survey.

<sup>38</sup>See appendix 5.

responses concerning lessons learned from the succession process were organized and categorized thematically. These responses also helped to inform the phase 2 questions.

With phase 1's completion, a reliable picture of these unique instances of multisite succession emerged. However, these were early examples of the process, and further investigation was needed in order to help churches in the future understand best practices for multisite succession. It was here—in discovering best practices for future iterations of succession—that phase 2 was employed.

### **Phase 2: Delphi Panel**

Researchers have defined the Delphi method as “an iterative process to collect and distill the anonymous judgments of experts using a series of data collection and analysis techniques interspersed with feedback.”<sup>39</sup> The Delphi method works well in areas where forecasting is necessary. When it comes to multisite pastoral succession, the examples that exist are relatively small. Thus, the Delphi method can be employed to determine best practices for future succession events. For this research, three rounds were utilized.

The first round employed an open-ended questionnaire, given to a panel of 12 experts, in order to hone in on best practices. These questions were divided into three categories: (1) practices for Gen 1 pastors, (2) practices for Gen 2 pastors, and (3) practices for multisite churches as an organization. Categories and questions were generated from the multisite literature base and phase 1's survey results. Questions were worded in a format similar to, “At what point . . .” or, “How should . . .” or, “Where should . . .” After the panel responded, answers were imported by question into NVivo, analyzed, and

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<sup>39</sup>Gregory J. Skulmoski, Francis T. Hartman, and Jennifer Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research,” *Journal of Information Technology Education* 6 (2007): 1, accessed September 16, 2016, [http://wiki.cbrnecc.ca/images/e/ef/JITEv6p001-021Skulmoski212\\_Delphi.pdf](http://wiki.cbrnecc.ca/images/e/ef/JITEv6p001-021Skulmoski212_Delphi.pdf).

coded.<sup>40</sup> Finally, the open-ended questions were translated into specific statements about pastoral succession for round 2. Eleven panelists completed round 1 and, after analysis, these responses resulted in 93 practices.

Round 2 was the first attempt at finding consensus. Whereas round 1 utilized open-ended questions, round 2 used the 93 specific statements and a Likert scale for each statement. Panelists were asked to scale from “1” to “4” the importance of each statement for multisite succession. Consensus on each statement was defined as 70 percent or more of the panel rating the item as “3” or higher. Round 2 resulted in a list of 76 best practices for which consensus existed.

Round 3 took the items for which there was consensus and, yet again, gave them to the panel. However, the panel was then asked to either “agree” or “disagree” with each item rather than ranking it. As in round 2, consensus was defined as 70 percent of the panelists agreeing on an item. At the conclusion of round 3, the final list of best practices emerged—with all 76 practices gaining consensus.

### **Research Conclusion**

To best understand the specific research questions on multisite succession contained in this study, one must not only look back at what has been, but project into the future as well. The church can learn from each instance of succession. However, this information has not yet been organized for the larger church community. Further, the individuals who have actually contributed to the succession process have a wealth of information. Thus, a two-phase sequential mixed methods study—one phase utilizing a survey and one utilizing a Delphi panel—serves as both the look backward as well as the projection into the future.

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<sup>40</sup>Coding strategy was developed by consulting Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016).

## **Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings**

The information found in phase 1 represented as much of the population as possible, yet the precise number of churches that have gone through succession is difficult to quantify. The findings from phase 1 should generalize well to multisite churches undergoing succession but not to single-site churches. Phase 2's panel limits generalization in three ways. First, this research looked at multisite churches with two or more geographical campuses. Thus, the findings would not specifically generalize to single-site churches or multisite churches that have multiple services on the same geographical campus.<sup>41</sup> Second, the research revolved around multisite churches in North America, so the research would not generalize well to churches outside of North America. Third, the definition of succession required the process to be *intentional*. Thus, the findings would not generalize to multisite churches that had to undergo succession due to moral failure, firing, a health crisis, etc.

## **Terminology**

When researching the multisite church and pastoral succession, different terms abound because of the complexity of the topics. This list of terms helps the reader understand how these concepts are used in this study.

*Autonomous church.* A church that is self-governing and self-sustaining.

*External hire.* When a church chooses a successor from outside of the current church organization.

*Generation 1 pastor/Gen 1 pastor.* The pastor who was the senior leader at the time the church became multisite. In some instances, this is also the founding pastor of the church, but that is not always the case.

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<sup>41</sup>Chap. 5 discusses implications of the research, and this study did reveal that numerous similarities exist between multisite and single-site succession. However, greater research would need to be done to ensure generalizability.

*Generation 2 pastor/Gen 2 pastor.* The pastor (or pastors, if leadership was handed from one pastor to a team) who took over as senior leader after the Gen 1 pastor handed over leadership. For the purposes of this study, the survey only looked at gen 1 to gen 2 succession, even if the church is now on a third- or fourth-generation leader.

*Geographic campuses.* Facilities in a geographic locale where the church meets for worship and (potentially) other ministry activity and/or offices.

*Governing board.* The group entrusted with the overall direction of the church in a legal capacity. Common boards might be called the elders, the administrative board, or the executive council.

*Internal hire.* When a church chooses a successor from someone inside the current church organization.

*Multisite church.* The definition given by Surratt, Ligon, and Bird was slightly adjusted for the purpose of this research. They define a multisite church as “one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multisite church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.”<sup>42</sup> The adjustment excluded congregations that meet on the same campus. Geographical distance was a necessity for this study. Thus, the definition is *one church meeting in multiple geographic locations*—different locations in the same region, different cities, states, or nations. Elements of vision, budget, leadership, and board remain.

*Pastoral succession (or simply succession).* Vanderbloemen and Bird define succession as “the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another.”<sup>43</sup> The key here is “intentional.” This research

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<sup>42</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 18.

<sup>43</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 10.

only looked at those churches that have gone through an intentional succession process from generation 1 to generation 2.

*Senior leadership team.* A group of staff members charged with implementing the overall direction of the church under the authority of the governing board.

*Senior pastor/leader or lead pastor.* This person is the leader of the church recognized organizationally and in title as the primary teacher and/or vision caster and the one ultimately responsible for leading the congregation to realize the vision for the entire church. Different churches might call this the senior pastor, lead pastor, senior leader, chairman, or, simply, pastor.

*Succession plan.* The agreed-upon elements that go into the Gen 1 pastor transferring leadership to the Gen 2 pastor(s). These plans vary in amount of detail, amount of time the succession process takes, preaching load, etc. However, most effective succession events have some planning incorporated into them.

### **Conclusion**

Research on the multisite church leaves one with great hope but also with much to be desired. The newness of the movement means that little data exist on some of the most essential elements of the multisite church. One of these elements is pastoral succession. With a large number of multisite churches in North America still in their first generation of leadership, the potential areas of study abound. However, one of the most important aspects for the longevity of the multisite church is how it transfers power from one pastor to the next. Thus, research needed to be done to better understand multisite pastoral succession. What one discovers when investigating this topic is that little research from which academicians and practitioners can learn exists.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Attempting to find the concepts of the multisite church combined with pastoral succession yields little published academic research and only a few published practical works. However, each one in isolation yields fruit. With experts believing the multisite church is “here to stay,”<sup>1</sup> the church would benefit from learning how to stay *beyond* its current leaders. This chapter begins by examining biblical and theological foundations for multisite churches and pastoral succession, and then summarizes multisite church movement in North America, followed by principles and examples of leadership succession in the marketplace and the church. When finished, a clear void in the literature base of pastoral succession within multisite emerges.

#### **Biblical and Theological Foundations**

That the Bible offers no definitive structure for churches does not mean that any church structure is permissible.<sup>2</sup> Church leaders must be driven by the Scriptures, empowered by the Spirit, and humble in their application. However, the lack of rigidity one finds in the New Testament suggests flexibility is needed and valuable to reach

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<sup>1</sup>Ed Stetzer, “Multisite Churches Are Here, and Here, and Here to Stay,” *The Exchange*, accessed November 13, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/multisite-churches-are-here-to-stay.html>. See also Warren Bird, “Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard: Faster Growth, More New Believers and Greater Lay Participation,” *Leadership Network*, 2014, 20, accessed July 15, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014\\_LN\\_Generis\\_Multisite\\_Church\\_Scorecard\\_Report\\_v2.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014_LN_Generis_Multisite_Church_Scorecard_Report_v2.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>For more on polity within the church today, see Chad Brand and R. Stanton Norman, eds., *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004). It is clear even within this work that multiple views of church structure amongst Christians account the Bible as authoritative and the ecclesiology as important to the mission of God.

people. With that in mind, this section investigates multisite from a biblical perspective, knowing it is one of many church models. From there, the discussion moves toward pastoral succession with a view of applying succession truths in multisite.

### **Foundations for the Multisite Church**

Arguing that the multisite church existed in the New Testament would be fallacious, but arguing that *no* compelling reasons for multisite exist is also fallacious.<sup>3</sup> Examples of the former exist within *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* when talking about leadership.<sup>4</sup> Surratt, Ligon, and Bird use Jethro’s advice about creating a hierarchy of leaders to help carry the leadership responsibilities (Exod 18:21-23). From this, the authors conclude, “You might say that Moses created the first multi-site church.”<sup>5</sup> However, Moses was not overseeing a church, nor should the authors retrofit their

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<sup>3</sup>This dissertation does not give full treatment to the issue around ecclesiology and the exegesis and usage of ἐκκλησία. Those issues are important for church leaders to examine and understand, but are only touched upon in this chapter. The exegetical arguments against multisite are often based around the idea that an ἐκκλησία is a singular gathering and thus churches that “gather” in multiple locations are not truly “one church,” but something else. The ecclesiological arguments come mainly from Congregationalists who do not believe one can have what looks like an Episcopalian or Presbyterian governance structure *and* be congregational. For examples of both of these critiques, see Darrell Grant Gaines, “One Church in One Location: Questioning the Biblical, Theological, and Historical Claims of the Multi-Site Church Movement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); John S. Hammett, “What Makes a Multi-Site Church One Church?” *Great Commission Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 95-107; Jonathan Leeman, “The Alternative to Multi-Site: Why Don’t We Plant?” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 52-54, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>; Jonathan Leeman, “Twenty-Two Problems with Multi-Site Churches,” *9Marks eJournal*, accessed November 6, 2015, <http://9marks.org/article/twenty-two-problems-with-multi-site-churches/>; Patrick Graham Willis, “Multi-Site Churches and Their Undergirding Ecclesiology: Questioning Its Baptist Identity and Biblical Validity” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>These examples were first brought to my attention in Gregg R. Allison, “Theological Defense of Multisite,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 8-10 accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>. Allison’s examination of the usage of Scripture herein, as well as several other examples in *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, demonstrates what is, at times, a rather poor biblical defense for multisite.

<sup>5</sup>Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 143. Equally interesting in this example is the anachronistic rendering of how Moses “continued to be the primary vision caster and the one ultimately responsible for the direction of the children of Israel, but he entrusted the day-to-day care and feeding of the people to trusted leaders.” Ibid.

definition to accommodate Exodus 18. They use Exodus 18 as the launching point for multisite churches needing good leaders. This would be beneficial except that their “top five campus-pastor qualities” are not exclusively biblical qualifications.<sup>6</sup> Allison critiques this position by stating, “Substituting biblical qualifications for requirements such as these denies the sufficiency of Scripture and establishes a kind of leadership that fails to reflect biblical standards.”<sup>7</sup> Better arguments focus upon (1) the gathered and scattered church in the first century, and the themes of (2) plurality, (3) cooperation, (4) and multiplication.

**“Gathering together” as a church.** Allison suggests better passages to defend multisite by looking into the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> The first is 1 Corinthians 11:17-20, which addressed the Corinthian church gathering for the Lord’s Supper. Three times in the passage, the apostle Paul mentions that the Corinthians “gather together”<sup>9</sup> to take the Lord’s Supper. However, they likely gathered from different smaller house churches into one larger gathering as a “whole church” (1 Cor 14:23). Gordon Fee asserts, “This implies that all the believers from all the house churches met together in some way.”<sup>10</sup>

That the larger congregation scattered into different homes was no surprise—there were no other meeting places (especially within the Diaspora). The earliest Christian community in Jerusalem had the temple, but many outside of Jerusalem did not. Luke describes the Jerusalem community in the book of Acts: “And day by day,

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<sup>6</sup>These qualifications are (1) “A leader who completely buys into the church’s vision and is loyal to its senior leadership” (2) “A team player with strong relational skills” (3) “A team builder who can reproduce in others” (4) “A pastor, someone with a desire and heart to shepherd groups and individuals” and (5) “A flexible entrepreneur.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 144.

<sup>7</sup>Allison, “Theological Defense,” 9. See also Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 312-15.

<sup>8</sup>Allison, “Theological Defense,” 9.

<sup>9</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>10</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 683.

*attending the temple together* and breaking bread *in their homes*, they received their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46, emphasis added). Paul also addresses the concept of churches in homes on multiple occasions (see Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2).<sup>11</sup> Roger Gehring presents the most thorough research on the ancient house church systems and structures and has found that there was a system of house churches in many of the cities in the New Testament. In fact, he found evidence for house churches that made up a “whole church at any given location [geographical place]” in Corinth, Rome, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi, and Laodicea.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 312n43, examines the Greek usage of *κατα* with the accusative and concludes, “What this point suggests with respect to the discussion at hand is that in these salutations, Paul specifically sends his greetings to the church (e.g., of Corinth) meeting in a particular member’s (or members’) home (e.g., Priscilla and Aquila). The interpretation should not be misunderstood to mean that the church (e.g., of Corinth) met exclusively in that member’s/members’ house and nowhere else. Rather, the interpretation is that from among the various house gatherings (e.g., of the church in the city of Corinth), the apostle targets his greetings to one specific gathering in a particular member’s/members’ house.”

<sup>12</sup>Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 225. For the entire argument, see pp. 119-228. In evaluating multisite and finding the model often unwarranted, Gaines is not convinced by house churches making up an entire local church as a precedent for multisite. In Gaines, “One Church,” 107-8, he presents four arguments in response:

First, those who argue for multiple house churches in a city frequently assume what they set out to prove. Second, recent evaluations of Greco-Roman domestic architecture reveal that much larger crowds could fit into a home than has previously been recognized. Third, arguing for the existence of a house church simply because a Christian household is mentioned in a biblical text is unwarranted. And fourth, even if a citywide church consisted of multiple house churches, there is evidence that citywide churches still held assemblies of “the whole church,” something that the majority of contemporary multi-site churches never do.

However, of his four arguments regarding house churches and whole city churches, Gaines makes similar leaps of reasoning of which he critiques multisite proponents. For example, in looking into ancient architecture, he concludes, “Large houses would have been available as venues for church gatherings. . . . This means that multi-site proponents cannot claim that there must have been networks of multiple house churches due to size restrictions in first century homes.” Ibid., 114-15. The assumption here is that because a home *could* hold an entire assembly that it necessarily *did* hold that assembly. Further, regarding Acts 2:46 (“breaking bread in their homes”), Gaines writes, “Whatever one’s interpretation of Acts 2:46 (‘breaking bread in their homes’), it should not be denied that the entire Jerusalem church met in one place.” Ibid., 111. No multisite advocate would disagree with this; they simply add to it that the church gathered in Jerusalem *also* met in homes and that was also part of being one church. In this way, Gaines is assuming what he set out to prove—that multisite does not fit the pattern. To his credit, Gaines does not argue that multisite is unbiblical. Rather, he argues that it is *often* not a single church: “It is possible,” Gaines notes, “for a multi-site church to be ‘characterized by actually assembling together’ if it holds whole church gatherings in which the members from all the sites assemble.” Ibid., 123n97.

J. D. Greear, pastor of the Summit Church, takes the house church as part of the citywide church idea and summarizes the implications for multisite well:

The New Testament nowhere demands that a local church meet all together each week. Nor is a single-service assembly the only model given in Acts. While it is certainly true that we see evidences of local churches assembling all together (1 Corinthians 11), we also see evidence of single local churches which met in multiple locations. The new congregation in Jerusalem is frequently referred to in the singular, one “church” (Acts 8:1; 11:22; 15:4). However, they obviously had to meet at different times and locations. Historians tell us there was no space in Jerusalem available to the disciples in which 3,000 or more people could have met on a weekly basis. It also appears that many first-century house churches came together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as one citywide church (see 1 Cor 11:17–20; Romans 16:5).<sup>13</sup>

While the referenced passages do not present the *necessity* for multisite, they present the *possibility* of multisite. Recognizing that the early church had a model (albeit somewhat fluid) of meeting that was both distributed *and* centralized, at the least, leaves the opportunity for multisite churches to exist. However, there are also several theological arguments for what is seen in modern-day<sup>14</sup> multisite ministry.

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<sup>13</sup>J. D. Greear, “A Pastor Defends His Multi-Site Church,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 19, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>. Greear and Gaines have responded to each other online as well. See Grant Gaines, “Assembly Is Essential Too: A Response to J. D. Greear,” *Pastor Grant’s Blog*, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://grantgaines.net/2014/09/30/assembly-is-essential-too-a-response-to-j-d-greear/>; J. D. Greear, “Is Multi-Site a Biblically Sound Model?” *JDGreear.com*, accessed December 1, 2015, [http://www.jdgreear.com/my\\_weblog/2014/10/multi-site-a-biblically-sound-model.html](http://www.jdgreear.com/my_weblog/2014/10/multi-site-a-biblically-sound-model.html). The concept of an interconnected city church is also discussed in some detail in Hammett, “What Makes a Multi-Site Church?”

<sup>14</sup>The term “modern-day” is used because it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt to argue multisite from church history. Attempts to find historical precedent for the multisite movement is helpful, but the movement stands unique in North America because of aspects of church staffing, 501c(3) status, facilities, mobility, technology, etc. Allison, “Theological Defense of Multisite,” 12-13, points out several arguments from history, and cites from G. Hugh Wamble, “The Concept and Practice of Christian Fellowship: The Connectional and Inter-Denominational Aspects Thereof, among Seventeenth Century English Baptists” (Th.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965). Not everyone is convinced of this reasoning, finding issue with whether or not history can be used as an argument for multisite. Willis, “Multi-Site Churches.” These historical structures might more closely reflect what Malcolm Grundy, church minister in the United Kingdom, calls “Multi-Congregation Ministry.” Grundy writes about the changing landscape of the church in the UK and how pastoral leaders can help oversee multiple congregations in specific areas. Malcolm Grundy, *Multi-Congregational Ministry: Theology and Practice in a Changing Church* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 2015).

**Plurality.** The New Testament mentions what church leaders recognize as a plurality of leaders in church, which has implications for multisite because the model itself is built upon having multiple leaders. While the book of Acts is not the prescription for church life (due to its transitional nature), it already sets the precedent for multiple leaders. Acts bridges readers from Jesus’ earthly ministry to Jesus’ ascended ministry through his Spirit. It further shows the transitions from law to grace, Jew to Gentile, anticipated First Advent to anticipated Second Advent, the gospel in Jerusalem to the gospel in the world, and all of this under the power of the Holy Spirit. New theology was developed, new issues addressed, and new peoples used.<sup>15</sup> Looking at Paul’s missionary journeys in Acts reveals that multiple leaders were being used to proclaim Christ and develop the church.

The missionary journeys began in Antioch with the Holy Spirit setting aside two men—Paul *and* Barnabas—for the mission. However, by the time they are at the first stop (Cyprus), “They had John [Mark] to assist them” (13:5).<sup>16</sup> So, though Paul and Barnabas were the leaders of the mission, they brought help.<sup>17</sup> After Mark abandons Paul and Barnabas (13:13), they dispute whether they should bring him along on a second journey (15:37-39) and cannot come to agreement. Instead of separating and traveling in isolation, they each take someone with them—Barnabas takes Mark and Paul takes Silas. Peterson notes, “Luke does not pass judgment on either party, but indicates that good

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<sup>15</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, *New Wine: A Study of Transition in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup>Mark’s precise role for the team is unclear, but the word ὑπηρέτην often means one who serves in a subordinate or assistant role. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1035.

<sup>17</sup>One reason Paul and Barnabas could have brought Mark was his familial tie to Barnabas (Col 4:10), which would not be unreasonable. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 443, also notes, “Mark is likely an eyewitness to Jesus’s ministry, something Barnabas and Saul may not have been.”

came out of the separation, because two mission teams were formed.”<sup>18</sup> From this point on, the narrative follows Paul and his team rather than Barnabas and his.

Paul adds Timothy to the mix—a young disciple who was “well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium” (16:2). Then, while traveling to the west coast of Asia Minor, Luke joins (16:10ff) them as the team heads to Macedonia and stays for several stops. While in Corinth, Paul comes across Priscilla and Aquila, they join him on his way to Ephesus (18:18-19), and then stay back as Paul continues.

On the third journey, Luke lists disciples who are traveling with Paul and his partners and are likely part of the groups supporting the Jerusalem Church (20:4-5).<sup>19</sup> When they join Paul is not known, but it is clear that the team surrounding Paul had been with him for some time and “represent his success from a wide-ranging mission.”<sup>20</sup> For Paul, traveling without ministry partners is not a serious consideration.<sup>21</sup> However, it was not just how Paul ministered, but also what he and those with him left behind—multiple leaders.

Throughout Acts, Paul and his group also interact with church leadership.<sup>22</sup> What is important for this in relationship to multisite is to recognize that Paul’s interactions with church leadership was always with a plurality of leaders. When he and Barnabas completed their first journey, they “appointed elders for them [the new disciples] in every

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<sup>18</sup>David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 448.

<sup>19</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 619.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>21</sup>The place where Paul ministers without Silas and Timothy is in Athens. Crisis in Berea led the disciples to take Paul to Athens and leave Silas and Timothy behind. Before the disciples left Paul in Athens, he gave them “command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible” (Acts 17:14). Silas and Timothy did not join Paul until after he had left Athens and ministered in Corinth, but Paul’s desire was to have them with him immediately.

<sup>22</sup>For a helpful treatment on this concept within Acts, see Shaw Perry, “The Missional-Ecclesial Leadership Vision of the Early Church,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37, no. 2 (April 2013): 131-39.

church” (14:23). Between the first and second journeys, at the Jerusalem Council (15:1-29), he and Barnabas talk with “the elders” and other leaders about whether circumcision is necessary for salvation (15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; see also 16:4). Then, at the end of the third journey, “from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him” (20:17).

After Acts, letter writers continue referring to elders in the plural (1 Tim 4:14; 5:17; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1, 5).<sup>23</sup> Mark Dever, pastor and scholar, summarizes the New Testament treatment of elders: “The direct evidence in the New Testament indicates that the common and even the expected practice was to have a plurality of elders in each local congregation.”<sup>24</sup> Michael Szigel, professor of theology, also recognizes a “clear establishment of a plurality of elders and a plurality of deacons during the apostolic period.”<sup>25</sup> Allison, too, finds “a plurality of elders is well attested for the earliest churches.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Hellerman investigates the New Testament and finds that the

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<sup>23</sup>The singular “elder” is used four times (1 Tim 5:19; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1). In three of those instances (1 Pet, 1 and 2 John), the authors are referring to themselves. John calls himself “the elder” and Peter calls himself “a fellow elder.” In 1 Timothy, Paul is talking about bringing accusations against “an elder,” which intimates that it is one of a plurality—especially when one considers Paul gives qualifications of elders (1 Tim 3).

<sup>24</sup>Mark Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 804.

<sup>25</sup>Michael J. Szigel, *RetroChristianity: Reclaiming the Forgotten Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 182.

<sup>26</sup>Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 294. While both affirming that plurality is a biblically ideal model, Allison and Dever would recognize a single-elder-led church as within the confines of Scripture. In writing on a single-elder church, Daniel Akin summarizes, “The New Testament allows flexibility on this point. Both a single elder and a plurality of elders within a congregational structure fit the pattern of church government and polity that emerges from a study of the New Testament.” Daniel Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible’s Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, ed. Brand and Norman, 26. Alexander Strauch also addresses the value of elder plurality while not excluding single elder leadership: “There are no sufficient New Testament examples and instructions to fully justify insistence on spiritual oversight by a plurality of elders, yet there is no command from the Lord, ‘Thou shalt have a plurality of elders.’” Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1988), 11. Moving beyond the New Testament church, Zachariah Vester’s thesis on shared leadership in the Apostolic Fathers finds consistent “patterns” of plurality amongst church leadership. Zachariah Lee Vester, “Patterns of Shared Leadership in the Apostolic Fathers” (Ed.D. thesis, The



“church family is not to be led by a single individual but by a group of people, variously identified in the New Testament as elders, overseers, or pastors (the terms are interchangeable).”<sup>27</sup> Plurality of leadership, particularly elders, can exist within a single-site and even single-service church.<sup>28</sup> However, multisite churches must have a plurality of leadership for their existence. Even multisite churches that deliver sermons via video<sup>29</sup> must develop pastoral leadership to execute ministry, develop leaders, and care for the congregation.

**Partnership.** A second theological foundation for multisite comes when considering the scriptural support for local church partnerships. The New Testament churches had concern for other local churches. One of the clearest ways was how the churches distributed finances. In Acts 11, Agabus prophesies of a famine and the Antioch church “determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). In times of crisis, many churches, past and present, have been quick to offer whatever relief they could, but this financial commitment to the Jerusalem church continues in Paul’s epistles. As Paul closes 1 Corinthians, he directs the Corinthians “on

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Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 249. Vester also finds plurality both within an individual church and broader communal cooperation amongst multiple churches. *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>27</sup>Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 186. Exegetical arguments for pastors, elders, bishops, and overseers really holding the same *office* are strong. See Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 211-12; Dever, “The Church,” 800-01; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 130-32; Svingel, *RetroChristianity*, 179-82.

<sup>28</sup>Some, such as Dever and Gaines, would see this model of single-service worship gatherings as the ideal way to live out a local church’s worshipping life.

<sup>29</sup>This dissertation does not delve into the conversation of video preaching and its effectiveness or usefulness for multisite ministry. For treatment of how churches use video campuses, see Charles Timothy Carter, “An Analysis of the Multi-Campus Approach of Local Church Ministry Utilizing First Baptist Church of Windermere, Florida, as a Paradigmatic Model” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 41-47; Brian Nathaniel Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 159-61, 231-34; Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 163-72; Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Roadtrip: Exploring the New Normal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 146-57.

the first day of every week” to “put something aside and store it up” (16:2). Paul would collect this offering and bring it to Jerusalem. It was not one-time giving but weekly giving—stored up—for the good of the saints in another region.

However, partnership is not only financial; partnership also comes in sharing of teaching. At the end of Colossians, Paul recognizes a church in the area separate from the one he was writing: “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col 4:15). Paul continues, “When this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16). While inappropriate to build an entire philosophy from one verse, the two congregations around Colossae were to share their letters in order to mutually build up one another. This partnership rarely happens in today’s church.<sup>30</sup>

The multisite church model expresses a *required* partnership amongst congregations because of the relationship between locations, leaders, governance, and other expressions of partnership. Gaines, coming from a Congregational perspective, argues against this and instead offers a different solution: associations and church planting:

In view of the fact that multi-site churches are outside the bounds of Scripture, why not plant churches and maintain close cooperation with an associational type of model? This practice has the potential to preserve many of the “benefits” of the multi-site approach, while simultaneously respecting the biblical nature of the local church as assembly. Multi-site churches could move toward turning each site into a church plant, and form, if they desire, their own association of churches that are bound not by church- governmental authority but by voluntary submission to a statement of faith and code of conduct. This might not provide the same level of control that a pastoral staff has in a multi-site situation, but it does have the advantage of (i)

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<sup>30</sup>Brian Haymes recognizes the deep connections local churches should have for each other, but he also knows they often fail to accomplish the type of connection and partnership desired. Regarding Baptists participating in their local associations, Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (London: Paternoster, 2008), 210, explains,

More attention should be paid by local churches to the associations of which they are members. . . . It is a sad fact that these organizations, increasingly served by professionals, can take on a life of their own over against the local churches. It is even possible that some hierarchy of ministry has arisen as those who lead such gatherings are thought to have greater significance. . . . There needs to be greater care taken by the local churches is [*sic*] sending representatives to these gatherings. They are not mandated delegates, but those of wisdom who are able to share the active listening and discerning of the mind of Christ.

preserving the biblical teaching of the church as assembly, (ii) avoiding the slippery slope toward liberalism characteristic of connectionalism, (iii) guarding a church from being driven by pragmatism, and (iv) providing the same benefits which the proponents of the multi-site model seek.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, Allison recognizes that “when a new church is spun off, the mother church and the daughter church quickly move away from each other and stop cooperating.”<sup>32</sup> This drift does not happen due to malice or frustration, but because each church must tend to its own needs. The multisite church provides a way for groups of Christians to work together in unity.<sup>33</sup>

**Multiplication.** Whenever one speaks of the local church, he or she should speak of multiplication closely thereafter. The reason is clear when looking at the Great Commission:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18-20)

Fulfilling the Great Commission continues in Acts where, after Jesus prophesies of the coming Holy Spirit and how the disciples will be his “witnesses” (1:8), Luke gives seven progress reports to illustrate the expansion of the gospel into the Roman world. As

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<sup>31</sup>Grant Gaines, “Exegetical Critique of Multi-Site: Disassembling the Church?” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 35-36, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>. Leeman, “The Alternative to Multi-Site,” offers the same type of critique.

<sup>32</sup>Allison, “Theological Defense,” 10.

<sup>33</sup>This concept of unity fits with Allison’s explanation of a local church in Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 29-30:

Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons, possess and pursue purity and unity, exercise church discipline, *develop strong connections with other churches*, and celebrate the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim his Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world.

While Allison’s connection is amongst “other churches” and the popular definition of multisite is that it is “one church,” the theological premise of partnership still applies here. Multisite offers an intentional way of developing those connections in a *sustaining* way.

the new community formed, Luke shared of God’s activity: “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (2:47b). After selecting the seven servants (Acts 6), Luke reports that “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (6:7). Again, in Acts 9:31, Luke shares, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” After the death of Herod Agrippa I, Luke reveals that “the word of God increased and multiplied” (12:34). These reports, which continue throughout the book (16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31), illustrate how committed the early community was to gospel expansion.<sup>34</sup>

For the multisite church, multiplication is at its core. Regardless of how one defines multisite,<sup>35</sup> multisite churches show a deep commitment to reaching people. Some churches began with a vision to reach people outside of church and then added sites as a deliberate strategy to do so. North Point Ministries in Atlanta, desires to create churches that “unchurched people love to attend.”<sup>36</sup> Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois, began with the goal of being “relentless about impacting people who were living outside a relationship with Jesus” and was “never interested in reaching people who were

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<sup>34</sup>Another aspect of this multiplication is the sharing of leadership and delegation of authority throughout Acts. In studying authority structures throughout Acts from a sociological perspective, Darin H. Land concludes that the leaders in Acts are what he calls “innovator-leaders,” who are able to create new structures and diffuse authority rather than hold onto it for themselves. “This selflessness on the part of the church’s leaders contributed to the spread of the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world. By regularly empowering new leaders, the church was able to release its leaders for ministry in new locations without fear of leaving established churches leaderless.” Darin H. Land, *The Diffusion of Ecclesiastical Authority: Sociological Dimensions of Leadership in the Book of Acts*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 90 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), 230. Throughout the journeys—and Acts as a whole—when power is given away, the church flourishes.

<sup>35</sup>As stated in chap. 1, a narrower definition of multisite is appropriate. However, the more popular definition is used within the research here in order to accommodate the current reality of multisite.

<sup>36</sup>This whole premise is developed in Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

already attending church.”<sup>37</sup> Brian Frye summarizes how the multisite model well accommodates this theme of multiplication.

The multi-site church arrangement, by nature and by necessity, demands an increased healthy balance in the participation and leadership of clergy and laity in starting, maintaining, and planting additional church sites and church plants. As multi-site churches continue to increase in size and number, they require an ever-expanding base of lay leaders to support church expansion and congregational health. As a result, multi-site churches will continue to demonstrate a more committed church constituency, a stronger leadership-based laity, a more defined leadership development system, and a more multiplication-minded church body than will single-site churches.<sup>38</sup>

**Conclusion.** This discussion does not aim to require one to accept multisite as necessary for church ministry. The topics discussed—(1) some flexibility in how churches assembled in the New Testament, (2) a plurality of leadership, (3) a strong desire for partnership and cooperation amongst churches, and (4) a focus on multiplication—have created the boundaries in which one can understand the multisite church. What comes to light is that the multisite church can fit into the boundaries of Scripture. Greear says it well in defending multisite:

We are not arguing that multi-site is *the only* scripturally faithful way to do church. And, as we have said, nor do we want to imply that all those pursuing the multi-site model are doing it in a biblically faithful way. In fact, we are very uncomfortable with many, if not most, popular expressions of multisite. Rather, we argue that the

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<sup>37</sup>Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 21. Multisite churches are also often deeply committed to church planting. Leadership Network found that 48 percent of multisite churches directly sponsor *new churches* by sending leaders or finances. Bird, “Multisite Church Scorecard,” 23. J. D. Greear has challenged The Summit Church to plant 1,000 churches by 2050. J. D. Greear, “How Can We Plant 1,000 Churches by 2050?” *JDGreear.com*, accessed December 7, 2015, [http://www.jdgreear.com/my\\_weblog/2014/03/how-can-we-plant-1000-churches-by-2050.html](http://www.jdgreear.com/my_weblog/2014/03/how-can-we-plant-1000-churches-by-2050.html). To go along with these, many multisite churches hire their campus pastoral leadership *internally* rather than externally, illustrating that they are capable of training their own ministers. Bird, “Multisite Church Scorecard,” 13. In fact, research shows that 87 percent of churches hire their campus pastors internally. When the apostle Paul went back through the towns he evangelized after his first missionary journey, he and Barnabas appointed elders in the newly established churches (Acts 13:23). These elders, as well as other elders appointed in the New Testament (see Titus 1:5; 2 Tim 2:2), appear to come from *within* the congregations themselves, illustrating that local congregations should be producing their leadership—something that multisite churches do at a high rate.

<sup>38</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church,” 313.

multi-site model can be faithful to the scriptural teaching on the church and might, in many situations, be the most prudent way to pursue all the biblical ideas the Lord Jesus puts forward for his church.<sup>39</sup>

As a biblically defensible model, the multisite church needs the larger church community's care and concern. It needs careful reasoning, helpful correction, and wise leadership to be as healthy as possible.

### **Foundations for Leadership Succession**

The Bible does not prescribe leadership succession as defined herein,<sup>40</sup> but it illustrates multiple places where leaders transition their power and authority.<sup>41</sup> Several themes develop when investigating these foundations. First, God is the superintendent of leadership succession because it is part of his redemptive plan. Second, Israel's history demonstrates succession's priority. Third, Jesus started his earthly ministry with the future in mind by choosing disciples and leaving the ministry to them. Fourth, the first century concerned itself with leadership diffusion. Finally, there are examples of senior leadership amongst a plurality of leaders in the New Testament.

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<sup>39</sup>Greear, "Is Multi-Site a Biblically Sound Model?"

<sup>40</sup>Lawrence Gilpin studied long-tenured pastoral transitions and found the same: "While it does not set forth a fully developed theology of ministerial transition," Gilpin concludes, "nor a clear model for transition following a spiritual leader of long tenure, the Bible does provide several examples in which one spiritual leader succeeded another." Lawrence A. Gilpin, "When the Long-Term Pastor Leaves: The Local Church Process of Pastoral Transition in the Presbyterian Church in America" (D.Min. project, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2006), 12.

<sup>41</sup>Very few of the works on church leadership succession point to biblical and theological issues in succession. Many, as this dissertation does, look at illustrations like Moses to Joshua or Paul to Timothy. What is often published is a successful minister's manual on how they transitioned. Tom Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015); Jay Passavant, *Seamless Succession: Simplifying Church Leadership Transitions* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2015); Bob Russell, *Transition Plan* (Louisville: Minister's Label, 2010). One of the first works on pastoral succession does incorporate some biblical principles, but even those are not deeply rooted in the mission of God. See Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 13-40.

**God's work in the world.** Thinking about succession should start with God's work of redemption. Christopher Wright argues for a missional hermeneutic to guide the Scriptures and focuses on God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12):

From a missiological perspective, the covenant with Abraham is the most significant of all biblical covenants. It was the origin of God's election of Israel as the means he would use to bless the nations, and it undergirds Paul's theology and practice of mission to the Gentiles in the New Testament.<sup>42</sup>

Genesis recounts the Lord telling Abram,

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12:1-3)

This covenant, so pivotal to scriptural narrative, focuses on the work of *God* in bringing people to himself, not the work of Abram.

The Davidic covenant continues this theme, and Wright would argue that even it is a continued application of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>43</sup> The Davidic covenant again shows numerous "I will" statements from the Lord:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, *I will* raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and *I will* establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and *I will* establish the throne of his kingdom forever. *I will* be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, *I will* discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam 7:12-16, emphasis added)

As the apostle Paul looked at the gospel extending to the Gentiles, he saw the continued fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. In recognizing the Gentiles' justification as part of God's promise to Abraham, Paul writes,

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<sup>42</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 327.

<sup>43</sup>Wright includes in this the covenant at Sinai: "The covenants at Sinai and with David not as wholly distinct covenantal arrangements but as developments of the covenant with Abraham in new circumstances." Ibid.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:13-14).

When leaders view pastoral succession as part of God’s plan in the world, the stakes change. The goal of succession no longer becomes maintaining the key benchmarks for the church<sup>44</sup>—keeping attendance high, not changing too much too soon, etc. Rather, succession becomes about God’s glory in the world, and God is the one superintending the work.<sup>45</sup> John Piper summarizes this idea well in writing about prayer, sovereignty of God, and work of the church: “God does not put his gospel and his people in the world and leave them to wage war on their own. He is the main combatant, and the battle is to be fought in a way that gives him the glory.”<sup>46</sup> Succession is a missional matter, is part of God’s desire to reach the world, and is demonstrated throughout the Scriptures as his work.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>These are wise and helpful principles—and while they are necessary when considering succession within the multisite church, they should not be the primary motivators in doing so. John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 1, introduces this idea clearly:

We pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matt. 18:3); there is no professional tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32); there is no professional panting after God (Ps. 42:1).

<sup>45</sup>William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 23, find this true as they write on pastoral succession: “The church is God’s bride. Perfecting her is God’s primary goal, and a big part of that perfection is ensuring seamless, fruitful leadership transitions.”

<sup>46</sup>John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 57.

<sup>47</sup>Gary May’s dissertation recognizes both aspects of divine and human leadership in succession. Speaking specifically about the church, Gary Royce May, “An Analysis of Selected Variables That Influence Postsuccession Performance in Southern Baptist Churches” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 21, explains,

God has chosen to work through human instruments in the leadership of his church. While the Holy Spirit will continue his ministry until the kingdom is finally established in heaven, human leaders will serve only a relatively few years, and then be succeeded by another person. Leadership changes have always occurred in human assemblies and organizations, and such changes will continue as



**Israel's history.** Israel's history shows the succession process in multiple places. For one, the Lord is recognized as the God "of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" or the one who promised the land to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Gen 32:9; 50:24; Exod 3:6, 15; 4:5; 33:1; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 9:5, 27; 30:20; 34:4; 2 Kgs 13:23; Jer 33:26).<sup>48</sup> Thus, Israel recognized God in relationship to the patriarchs and their physical lineage.

However, one might argue that such an acknowledgement is more about the covenant than about succession. Still, there are multiple examples of leadership succession in the Old Testament. First, and often cited, is the relationship between Moses and Joshua. Moses led the people and sought God, but Joshua assisted Moses (Exod 24:13)—and later he succeeded Moses. Numbers 27 illustrates the succession plan.

The LORD said to Moses, "Go up into this mountain of Abarim and see the land that I have given to the people of Israel. When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarreled, failing to uphold me as holy at the waters before their eyes." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.) Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd." So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation." And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the LORD directed through Moses. (vv. 12-21)

As Moses' life was ending, he commissioned Joshua to "be strong and courageous" as he entered the land (Deut 31:23). The Lord repeats this to Joshua as Israel prepares to enter the land (Josh 1:2-9). Many recognize this succession as a model of

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long as God uses people as divine instruments of leadership. Scripture appears to include methods of succession that continue to be used by the church today.

<sup>48</sup>This language is continued into the New Testament as well (Matt 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32).

leadership succession.<sup>49</sup> While the implications for the succession of the leadership of Israel differ from multisite church pastoral succession, what is clear is God’s desire to see succession and see it happen well.

Another scriptural example of succession happens throughout the history of the monarchy, with both kings and prophets. The Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16) promises “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me” (7:16). This lineage, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 1:1-17), followed familial succession, and the lineage of Israel mainly followed familial succession.<sup>50</sup> During the kingdoms, the prophets also spoke, and another important example of leadership succession is that of Elijah and Elisha.<sup>51</sup> Elisha, who left his work to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19-21), asked Elijah for “double portion” of his spirit (2 Kgs 2:9) before the Lord took Elijah (2:11). From that point on, Elisha ministered with the power of Elijah.<sup>52</sup>

Much like that of Moses and Joshua, the kings of Israel and Judah and the relationship with Elijah and Elisha present principles and not requirements. However, they reveal that (1) God is intimately concerned about leadership transition, (2) leadership transitions often take time, and (3) there are varying degrees of “success” within leadership transitions.

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<sup>49</sup>Henry J. Barry, Jr., “Leadership Succession: A Contingency Plan for the Independent Church” (D.Min. thesis, Bethel Seminary, 2011), 24-26; Gilpin, “When the Long-Term Pastor Leaves,” 13-14; Clifford Todd Hartley, “About My Father’s Business: Pastoral Succession from Father to Son” (D.Min. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 12.

<sup>50</sup>An example of succession by murder occurs in 2 Kgs 15:10-14, where Shallum kills Zechariah, and then Menahem kills Shallum.

<sup>51</sup>It is common for succession research to reference this relationship as important when considering leadership succession. Barry, “Leadership Succession,” 26-27; Gilpin, “When the Long-Term Pastor Leaves,” 23-24; May, “An Analysis of Selected Variables,” 25.

<sup>52</sup>Barry, “Leadership Succession,” 26, notes the unique role of Elisha’s cloak in these exchanges: “Throwing a prophet’s cloak around a person symbolized the passing of power and authority. Elisha’s response indicates that he was fully aware of its meaning, for he immediately abandoned his own work to follow Elijah.”

**Jesus and the disciples.** Jesus models leadership transfer from one generation to the next through his disciple-making. His model is accessible to church leadership because of its reproducibility. Jesus was quick to call his disciples with a purpose. He wanted to make them “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17) and called them so “they might be with him and he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). His process was not immediate, but took time. A. B. Bruce’s *The Training of the Twelve* recognizes, “From the evangelistic records it appears that Jesus began at a very early period of his ministry to gather round him a company of disciples, with a view to the preparation of an agency for carrying on the work of the divine kingdom.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, Jesus’ selection of the twelve began with his vision for their future. This vision required that Jesus develop and empower the disciples to fulfill that future.<sup>54</sup>

Jesus guided his disciples in ministry, even sending them out to preach, cast out unclean spirits, and heal diseases (Matt 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1-2). These tasks were part of his ministry preparation, but he kept the disciples near him and helped them evaluate their ministry experience. The apostles came back to Jesus and then “told him all they had done and taught” (Mark 6:30). Robert Coleman writes,

Jesus made it a point to meet with his disciples following their tours of service to hear their reports and to share with them the blessedness of his ministry in doing the same thing. In this sense, one might say that his teaching rotated between instruction and assignment. What time he was with them, he was helping them to understand the reason for some previous action or getting them ready for some new experience. His questions, illustrations, warnings, and admonitions were calculated to bring out those things that they needed to know in order to fulfill his work, which was the evangelization of the world.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 12.

<sup>54</sup>This transition over time is seen in some of the most prominent published successions. Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*; Passavant, *Seamless Succession*; Russell, *Transition Plan*.

<sup>55</sup>Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006), 81. James MacDonald, a prominent multisite church pastor in Illinois who practices video preaching, picks up on this idea of reproduction and need to continue reproduction—even of himself. James MacDonald, quoted in Scott McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation* (Nashville: B & H and Lifeway, 2009), 22, writes,

Coleman looks at the life of Jesus and finds eight principles of discipleship: (1) “selection,” where Jesus chooses the disciples; (2) “association,” where he lives his life around his disciples; (3) “consecration,” where he demands obedience; (4) “impartation,” where he gives of himself to his disciples; (5) “demonstration,” where he shows how to minister; (6) “delegation,” where he entrusts them to minister; (7) “supervision,” where he watches them minister; and (8) “reproduction,” where he commands they repeat the work of discipleship in the world.<sup>56</sup>

Bill Hull’s work in *The Disciple Making Pastor* is similar to Coleman in its view of the elements Jesus’ disciple-making ministry—though Hull adjusts the categorization—and uses the categories to teach pastors to train others. Hull uses six movements: (1) “tell them what,” (2) “tell them why,” (3) “show them how,” (4) “do it with them,” (5) “let them do it,” and (6) “deploy them.”<sup>57</sup> Further, Dave and Jon Ferguson, co-founders and pastors of the multisite Community Christian Church in Illinois, have developed a process for leader training that resembles these divisions.<sup>58</sup> They use five statements: (1) “I do. You watch. We talk.” (2) “I do. You help. We talk.” (3) “You do. I help. We talk.” (4) “You do. I watch. We talk.” (5) “You do. Someone else watches.”<sup>59</sup> Regardless of

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Multi-site as a focus has a lot of merit and we have done it, but it is also important that it does not diminish the hard work of reproducing ourselves in the lives of others. Some people are uniquely gifted to preach, but I really believe that the principles of communicating God’s Word are transferable to other gifted people. We have to be careful that when we are perpetuating satellites [other campuses] that we are not really saying, “It is all reproducible except me.” That would be an abdication of our responsibility to do the harder work of raising up others.

<sup>56</sup>Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21-97.

<sup>57</sup>Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1988), 190-211.

<sup>58</sup>Ferguson and Ferguson use the word “apprenticeship” rather than “discipleship.” Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 45, explain

When people use the word *disciple* today, though, it has almost nothing to do with our mission. Discipleship in the church today has more to do with consuming and absorbing cognitive content than it has anything to do with missional action. . . . I’m convinced that it will take at least another generation for us to recover the meaning of the word *disciple* so it is heard in the way Jesus meant for it to be heard. (emphasis original)

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 63-64.

language, these models—built off the life of Christ—show a slow but deliberate process of handing authority away to trained successors.

Even as Jesus revealed his future to the disciples (John 16), he was training and explaining. The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) reveals Christ’s expectation that his own disciples would “go . . . and make disciples of all nations,” and he even envisions in Acts that they will “receive power” with the coming Holy Spirit so that they can be his witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ example demonstrates both the *need* to train future leaders (successors) but also the *urgency* of doing so; and his model continued through the church after his ascension.

**The church.** After Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:9), the apostles selected another apostle, Matthias, to join them as one of the twelve (1:21-26);<sup>60</sup> and after the Holy Spirit fills the disciples (2:1-4) and creates the new community, the church begins.<sup>61</sup> What the life of Christ reveals about disciple-making continues on through the apostles—most clearly through the apostle Paul.

In Colossians 1:28-29, Paul articulates the value of maturation: “Him [Christ] we proclaim,” writes Paul, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” For Paul, this included the *continuation* of teaching in others—and Paul saw Timothy as one he trained for such purposes. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul reminds Timothy that “what you have heard from me in the presence

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<sup>60</sup>The selection of Matthias is used as an argument for the concept of apostolic succession, which is the idea that Jesus left behind Peter and the apostles to continue the unbroken transition of leadership in the church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads, “Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops.” Catholic Church, ed., *Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 249.

<sup>61</sup>Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 78-82, explains the beginning of the church at Pentecost.

of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Later, Paul explains how his example for Timothy gives Timothy something to follow:

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. (2 Tim 3:10-11)

In his research of leadership succession in the Greco-Roman world as well as the Pastoral Epistles, Perry Stepp finds that succession might serve multiple functions. First, succession might “ensure continuity of possession,” where property can be maintained from person to person. Second, it might “ensure continuation of manner,” which “focuses on a characteristic attitude or action that the predecessor and the successor share.” Third, succession might “ensure continuity of institutional vitality” because it keeps a specific institution (a church, for example) “vital and effective.” Fourth, succession might function to “ensure realization of an effect”—with the succession bringing about a reality started by the predecessor. Fifth, succession could “ensure continuation of effect.” Here, succession “focuses on an effect/result which is shared by the predecessor and the successor but the realization of which is not dependent on the succession.” Finally, succession might “legitimate the succession” by bringing about a certain status or authority to the successor.<sup>62</sup> When Stepp compares these functions to 1 Timothy, he finds that Christ’s authority given to Paul continued the vitality of the ministry, “legitimizes” Paul’s authority, and had “continuity of effect.” When Paul hands authority to Timothy, it made Timothy a legitimate leader, has the “continuity of manner” in the ministry of the church, and also “continued institutional vitality” for the church.<sup>63</sup> Stepp finds that Paul took succession seriously.

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<sup>62</sup>Perry L. Stepp, *Leadership Succession in the World of the Pauline Circle*, New Testament Monographs 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 193-94.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

In looking further at the interaction between Paul and Timothy, one finds that their relationship is both familial<sup>64</sup> and built upon imitation. Paul viewed Timothy as brother and son and entrusted gospel ministry to him. He had concern for how other churches would imitate his example. He urges the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), and asks the same of the Philippians (Phil 3:17). Paul recognizes that the Thessalonians “became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” (1 Thess 2:14). Colin Marshall and Tony Payne see this relationship imitation as imperative for training: “The chain of imitation flows from the Lord Jesus himself, whom Paul is copying, through to Timothy (who models himself on Paul, and reminds others of Paul’s ways), and to the believers, who become ‘imitators of us and the Lord.’”<sup>65</sup> Imitation is necessary in discipleship, and such a process serves pastors when going through succession.<sup>66</sup>

As Stepp closes his study of leadership succession, he turns to the necessity for churches to take the topic of leadership succession seriously. Based upon his observations in the Pauline world compared to church life today, Stepp writes,

Succession is largely neglected in Christian ministry today. This is likely due in part to the individualistic nature of the Western concept of self, the way this individualism shapes the ministries most Christian leaders lead, and the nature (dare I say fallen?) of the pervasive concept of human leadership and power, in and out of Christendom. . . . Still, transition in leadership is inevitable. The general neglect and

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<sup>64</sup>Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 76-96, summarizes well Paul’s familial language for the churches in the New Testament.

<sup>65</sup>Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias, 2009), 73.

<sup>66</sup>When Bob Russell announced his retirement years in advance, some asked if that was too much time to work together. Russell, *Transition Plan*, 23, responded, It can be . . . But almost any plan can work if the people involved are ready and willing to sacrifice their egos. Dave [incoming pastor] and I worked at transitioning for six years and rarely had any tension. . . . In most cases, one or two years should be a sufficient amount of time for a transition team to work together, especially if the successor comes from within the church and is familiar with its culture.

apathy that characterize many Christian leaders' attitude toward succession is unfortunate and inexplicable.<sup>67</sup>

**Senior leadership in the church.** While the above discussion can apply to any person who might go through leadership succession within the church,<sup>68</sup> not everyone is a senior pastor. Thus, the concept of senior leadership must be investigated to determine if there is warrant for a senior or lead pastor within churches. The concept of leader plurality has been discussed, but one might assume that plurality of leadership diminishes the need for pastoral transition. This, however, neglects the individual giftedness of the leaders. Strauch writes,

While it is true that equal status exists among the elders, each elder has his own spiritual gift or gifts, so there will be distinct individual gifts, talents, education, and devotion among the eldership. . . . The personality, gifts, and spirituality of its individual members make up the overall temperament and competency of the church eldership.<sup>69</sup>

Leadership is a spiritual gift (Rom 12:8), but it is not a requirement for being an elder.<sup>70</sup> Thus, church leadership is largely character-based, not gift-based. However, senior leadership was evident. Jesus kept Peter, James, and John closer to him than he did the other disciples (Matt 17:1; Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33; Luke 8:51; 9:28). Further, Peter is the dominant voice at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Though “the apostles and elders were gathered together to consider the matter” (15:6), it is Peter who stood up and first addressed the crowd (15:7-11), with Paul and Barnabas also sharing what happened

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<sup>67</sup>Stepp, *Leadership Succession*, 203.

<sup>68</sup>J. D. Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 134, writes, “Everything else we do is ultimately in support of that one thing [discipleship]. Disciple-making was the central component of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), and it ought to be the standard by which we should judge every ministry in the church.”

<sup>69</sup>Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 248.

<sup>70</sup>Aubrey Malphurs, professor of pastoral ministry, writes, “It is not mandatory that believers have the leadership gift to lead, just as it’s not necessary that a person have the gift of evangelism to share his or her faith.” Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 21.



amongst the Gentiles (15:12). James, the brother of Jesus, then summarizes the decision (15:13-21). The council does not give these men the title of “senior leader” or “lead pastor,” but their roles in the meeting differ from those of the others present.<sup>71</sup> Senior leadership amongst a plurality of leaders is a way to recognize the giftedness of the church while not allowing such unique giftedness to overrule the team of leaders.<sup>72</sup>

**Conclusions.** This discussion presents a clear scriptural case for transition. First, God is superintending transition and the preservation of the news of his salvation, which is evidenced in the succession throughout the Old Testament as God led his people (Moses to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, and the monarchy). Jesus also shows succession planning in preparing the disciples for ministry, as seen in the first generation of the church through the apostle Paul and how he interacted with the churches he served. The evidence from Scripture is that, while leaders are equal in identity, they function through different spiritual gifts; and that allows for the role of a senior leader amongst a team of leaders within a local church.

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<sup>71</sup>Explaining church order after the apostolic age, Svigel, *RetroChristianity*, 187, writes, “What we see when the apostles and prophets pass off the scene is a distinct order: (1) the single overseer (*episkopos*), who was the presiding elder, or, in our modern idiom, the ‘senior pastor’; (2) the elders (functioning as pastors, teacher, evangelists, etc.), who led individual home groups or, when the whole local church could meet in one place, carried on distinct responsibilities in the church; and (3) the deacons, and perhaps, deaconesses (ministers, servants, administrators), who assisted the elders in the word of the ministry.” Though Svigel’s language is slightly different from Strauch’s, the conclusions are the same: there is evidence of a presiding elder amongst a team of elders.

<sup>72</sup>Avoiding a plurality of giftedness amongst elders is one of the warnings, Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 250, speaks to in senior leadership.

Of course there is a constant danger that other elders will relinquish their responsibilities and obligations to one or two exceptionally gifted men. This danger will always exist because of man’s selfish and lazy tendency, particularly in spiritual matters, to let someone else do all the work. . . . In the church, however, gifted teachers, pastors, and leaders must not monopolize the ministry or be raised to unscriptural status. As humble servants, gifted leaders are to build up their fellow brethren so that all can more fully serve the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11, 12). In no way does the principle of [first among equals] mean that one person is authorized to take final responsibility for all decisions. . . . Instead, decisions are made in mutual dependence upon one another.

## **A Biblical and Theological Need for Multisite Succession Research**

Combining these two ideas—(1) the multisite church is a biblically permissible expression of church life and (2) succession is an important part of Scripture’s unfolding—develops the foundation for this study. Church leaders must help the multisite church (inasmuch as they are able) pass the baton of leadership to future generations. This necessity for transition is not just an organizational principle, but part of fulfilling the Great Commission. With these principles in mind, the trend of the multisite church and the literature on leader succession can be investigated.

### **The Multisite Church Trend in North America**

How the multisite church grew to its current state in North America<sup>73</sup>—and where it came from—is difficult to pinpoint.<sup>74</sup> As previously discussed, tying multisite all the way back to Moses is an overreach,<sup>75</sup> but so is attempting to mirror the modern multisite church and the Acts 2:42-47 model of church life. With the foundations for multisite and pastoral succession in mind, attention now turns to answering the questions of (1) what led to the multisite church in North America, (2) how the movement grew,

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<sup>73</sup>Some of the language and structuring here comes from Frye, “The Multi-Site Church.” Covering the years of 1950-2010, Frye has done the most extensive research into the multisite church, its history, and factors that have contributed to its current iteration. Any dissertation on multisite has to handle his work in order to grasp the depth and breadth of the movement. Frye’s most beneficial aspects are his explanation of the factors which lead to multisite and then showing the rapid growth of the movement in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (chaps. 3 and 4 of his diss.). The structure in the first two sections herein (“Antecedents to Multisite,” and “Early Examples of Multisite”) reflects his own chapter divisions.

<sup>74</sup>John Hammett tries to locate the model in history. He investigates Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational polities. He concludes, “Seeking intimate connection with other congregations does seem to have some slight historical precedence among seventeenth-century English Baptists, but for the most part, *multi-site churches are pursuing a path with little historical backing.*” John Hammett, “Have We Ever Seen This Before? Multi-Site Precedents,” *9Marks eJournal* 6, no. 3 (June 2009): 30, emphasis added, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://dev.9marks.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/journal200963mayjun.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 143.

and (3) what the future has in store. Answering these questions shows that the literature gives little attention to the long-term future of multisite.

### **The Roots of Multisite**

Surratt, Ligon, and Bird address a paradox when they write,

In some ways, the multi-site church is not new. Some argue that the church of the New Testament era was multi-site in many cities. . . . Digital technologies, combined with growing social acceptance of branch-church ideas, have made a new movement possible today.<sup>76</sup>

Though they find that the movement *might* be able to be traced back to ancient times, they simultaneously recognize that modern developments have led to its explosion on the church landscape. Thus, it is fair to look at *modern* developments that led to what is now the multisite church—both the antecedents to the movement and some of its early examples.

**Antecedents to multisite.** In assessing the roots of the multisite church, John Hammett recognizes that “the idea and practice of unity in multi-site churches seems tied to modern developments in communication, transportation, and technology.”<sup>77</sup> Hammett’s point is that, regardless of how one tries to find multisite in history, the multisite church could not exist without these “modern developments.” Many would agree with this assessment.<sup>78</sup> However, it is Frye who dedicates an entire chapter in his dissertation to what he calls “catalytic factors” that were “*essential* to the dawn of the multi-site church.”<sup>79</sup> He investigates multiple sources in the church and on multisite and finds three such

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<sup>76</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 91.

<sup>77</sup>Hammett, “Have We Ever Seen This Before?,” 30.

<sup>78</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird devote an entire chapter to how to use technology in multisite churches: “Finding the right technology for your church will be driven by vision, values, and budget, but the right decisions can help open the door to God’s next step for the ministry of your church.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 169. While it is not new for churches to consider new technologies, the precipitous growth of the multisite church has come on the wave of technological advancement—specifically AV technologies—through the late 1990s and early 2000s.

<sup>79</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church,” 66, emphasis original.

factors.

Frye's first factor is "economic advancement."<sup>80</sup> Tracing economic developments related to Keynesianism in a post-World War II United States, he links the boom in the economy to a new financial reality for Americans and an increase in consumerism. This was found in both the church world and the greater American landscape. Frye concludes,

The flood of new products, goods, and buildings (secular and sacred) signaled a shift within post-war America. Faced with a myriad of options, Americans found themselves choosing from not one, but many types of many things. For those of the war generation, choices were something new in many regards, but they soon acquiesced to the world of choices.<sup>81</sup>

Lyle Schaller sees the financial resources and expanded choices as *benefiting* the multisite church. Schaller gives six reasons why churches should consider multisite—two of which support expanded choice. His third reason "is that the larger membership can provide the financial resources needed to purchase the land and construct the new buildings."<sup>82</sup> His fifth reason "can be summarized by the word *choice*. By continuing to function as one congregation . . . the multisite church can offer people a broader range of choices than either could if the decision had been made to divide and become two separate churches."<sup>83</sup> Both reasons leverage consumerism. Frye agrees, writing, "Regardless of a church's intention for being multi-site, catering to the desires, preferences, and 'choice' of consumers is central for the multi-site mechanism."<sup>84</sup> This choice was part of the cultural landscape of post-World War II America.

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<sup>80</sup>Frye, "The Multi-Site Church," 66.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>82</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the Twenty-First Century*, Ministry for the Third Millennium (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 116.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup>Frye, "The Multi-Site Church," 74. This observation from Frye is accurate, and the idea that multisite churches cater to people is a common critique. Thomas White and John M. Yeats, *Franchising McChurch: Feeding Our Obsession with Easy Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 163,

Frye's second factor is "accelerated mobility."<sup>85</sup> Hammett and others concur, recognizing that the mobility that modern innovations have brought has paved the way for the multisite church. Frye writes of the post-war mobility:

While the automobile was critical to moving America into suburbanization, more was necessary to transition the masses away from the urban core. Suburbanization necessitated a binary catalyst in mobility. Cars were the mobilizing mechanism, but the suburbanization process required a mobilizing conduit. That conduit came with the interstate highway system ratified by the Federal Highway Act of 1956.<sup>86</sup>

This ease of travel has helped the multisite church grow into what it is today. Staffs can now travel across town with relative ease for training, relational connection, and staff meetings. These are important ways to carry the values of a multisite church. Christopher Kouba researched numerous multisite church campus pastors and found that many of them focus on weekly or monthly staff meetings for all campuses to maintain vision and develop church culture.<sup>87</sup> Though some multisite churches have an

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conclude, "Our inclination is that the multisite methodology should be feared rather than condemned. It typically creates a consumer mentality, undermines church planting, compromises ecclesiology, and focuses on numerical growth as a measure of success." White and Yeats do not interact with the many positive aspects of multisite but rather focus on the main concerns—which could aptly apply to any large church, regardless of whether it is multisite or not. However, Warren Bird's dissertation presents a different landscape for larger churches. Bird designed research to investigate whether or not it was fair to label megachurches as spectator churches, and found that, from what he tested, "The evidence does not justify the generalization that megachurches are 'spectator religion' as compared to other churches. Instead, megachurches seem to compare favorably to smaller churches in measures of participation opportunities." Warren Bird, "Megachurches as Spectator Religion: Using Social Network Theory and Free-Rider Theory to Understand the Spiritual Vitality of America's Largest-Attendance Churches" (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 2007), 195. More specifically regarding the multisite church, Frye, "The Multi-Site Church," 200, critiques White and Yeats: "White and Yeats offer little documentation or research to validate their arguments. Perhaps they will provide ample evidence to support their claims in the future, but until they do, *Franchising McChurch* cannot be utilized reasonably or responsibly to evaluate multi-site churches or the multi-site church movement."

<sup>85</sup>Frye, "The Multi-Site Church," 81. Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 27, write of the multisite church: "In short, *multi-site* summarizes today's approach to church in which geography is no longer the defining factor. Gone is the day when gatherings must happen on Sunday mornings and in a church sanctuary (or equivalent) with a steeple on top for it to be called 'church.'"

<sup>86</sup>Frye, "The Multi-Site Church," 83. This act brought an additional 41,000 miles of interstate highway to the United States.

<sup>87</sup>Christopher Barton Kouba, "Role of the Campus Pastor: Responsibilities and Practices in Multisite Churches" (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 65-70.

international presence, many focus around a specific region. Frye finds that the growth of numerous multisite churches “would not have been possible without the automobile and the national highway system tandem.”<sup>88</sup>

The third factor of multisite is likely the most obvious:

technological innovation. . . . To become a movement, the multi-site church concept needed something more than physical mobility to advance and enlarge it. It needed much greater connectivity on a variety of levels in order to propel the multi-site church idea to a movement.<sup>89</sup>

LifeChurch.tv could not have existed just a few decades ago, as Surratt, Ligon, and Bird explain its “Global Operations Center (GOC)”:

Located in a conference room on the second floor of their Edmond campus, the GOC looks like a smaller version of NASA’s mission control. Projected on one wall is a matrix of live feeds from various LifeChurch.tv campuses. . . . Next to the matrix you’ll find screens with real-time updates listing the weekend attendance at each campus, as well as other crucial measurements fed by LifeChurch.tv’s Church Metrics software . . . . In the middle of the room is a large conference table with several audio stations. At each station, a user can listen in on any one of the individual “experiences” . . . live at any LifeChurch.tv campus. Each experience is recorded and can be viewed at any time.<sup>90</sup>

The multisite church experience is new on the landscape of modern church life and is impossible to locate in churches of the past. These factors are new realities for the church today, but they are realities. While churches may accept or reject such factors, they have contributed to what has become the multisite church.

**Early examples of multisite.** Considering these factors, one finds the early and necessary conditions of what led to the multisite church. As these factors led to a new way for Americans (and church leaders) to think, other changes were happening in the church world that helped give birth to the modern expression of the multisite church. While there are multiple early examples of what has become the “one church in multiple

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<sup>88</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church,” 84.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>90</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*, 106.

locations” mantra that exists today,<sup>91</sup> two will be considered: (1) the Key Church Strategy and (2) Perimeter Church.

One of the earliest examples of multisite comes from the Key Church Strategy, which grew out of the ministry of Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, in the late 1970s. Gambrell Street Baptist Church could not assimilate members from the surrounding community, and many of its membership gains happened by way of transfer growth. J. V. Thomas, who worked for the Baptist General Convention developed what was called the Key Church Strategy.

He suggested that the congregation at Gambrell Street Baptist Church become an anchor, or *key* church in the community, through which multiple new congregations would be started. The plan called for these new congregations to reflect the multiple cultures making up their neighborhood.<sup>92</sup>

Ahlen and Thomas find that “the mission congregations” of the Key Church Strategy “received almost half of their new members through conversation and baptism.”<sup>93</sup> With the Key Church Strategy, larger churches could establish indigenous churches and mission congregations they could not assimilate into their more established congregations.<sup>94</sup> The Key Church Strategy showed that churches were considering new ways to reach people. Schaller writes, “A central component of this strategy is that a relatively homogenous congregation can reach and be engaged in ministry with a widely diverse collection of people through off-campus ministries.”<sup>95</sup> Schaller defines the Key

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<sup>91</sup>For more in-depth treatment of these expressions, see Frye, “The Multi-Site Church,” 32-62.

<sup>92</sup>J. Timothy Ahlen and J. V. Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations: The Key Church Strategy*, ed. Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 22.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>94</sup>Tim Keller, “Why Plant Churches,” Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 3, accessed November 6, 2014, [http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why\\_Plant\\_Churches-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf), speaks of this reality when arguing the priority of church planting: “New congregations *empower* new people and new peoples much more quickly and readily than can older churches. Thus they always have and always will reach them with greater facility than long-established bodies.”

<sup>95</sup>Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry*, 80.

Church Strategy as “the discovery that one congregation can meet in two different locations.”<sup>96</sup> While the Key Church Strategy has elements of the modern multisite church, it is still not fully reminiscent of what exists today.

Another early example of the multisite church, and one that is closer to what exists today, is Perimeter Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Randy Pope began Perimeter Church in the Atlanta area in 1977, and it is recognized as one of the first multisite churches.<sup>97</sup> Pope spent significant time alone seeking “a vision from the Lord” that was “doomed to failure unless God be in it.” That vision was “to start a church with the intention of literally impacting an entire metropolitan city.”<sup>98</sup> Pope explains how the multisite model fit this vision well:

It became obvious that a church making such an impact would have to be decentralized into all geographical areas of the city and would have to include many cultures. The expression “One church—many congregations” seemed to express the concept. Within two years of beginning Perimeter Church, we felt it was time to birth a second congregation that we called “Perimeter West.” I preached an early service at our original location, left before the service had ended, drove approximately ten miles to our new congregation, and walked in just in time to preach. Then, before that service was complete, I got back into my car and drove back to our original congregation, once again, just in time to preach in the second service.<sup>99</sup>

Though Pope eventually added staff to take the preaching load at additional campuses, he would still rotate preaching throughout the locations. He recalls, “As complicated as it sounds, it all worked surprisingly well.”<sup>100</sup> However, as time progressed, and with the elders pressing in to ask him about starting more locations, Pope no longer felt as if the model of multiple campuses fit the true vision of Perimeter. Pope called a

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<sup>96</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, foreword to Ahlen and Thomas, *One Church, Many Congregations*, 13-14.

<sup>97</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church,” 94-104, considers Perimeter Church the multisite “primogenitor.”

<sup>98</sup>Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry Design* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 126.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.



staff gathering to resolve this tension but was unsuccessful at finding solutions. A consultant presented a solution of recording a sermon one Sunday at the main campus and sending it to the three other campuses the following Sunday.<sup>101</sup> However, Pope felt the model was too dependent on one pastor.<sup>102</sup> Instead, Perimeter church created a ministry, Perimeter Ministries International, which served the vision of Perimeter Church of planting churches throughout the city. One of their first moves was to get out of their multisite model. Ten years of multisite resulted in four independent churches that were a part of Perimeter Ministries International.<sup>103</sup>

Pope felt that getting out of multisite (as he was practicing at the time) was important because it allowed clear contextualization of the campuses. He quickly saw the fruit of this endeavor:

When we particularized our three congregations, there was instant growth in maturity. It was like adult children in a family. True, our youngest congregation could probably have been served well to stay at home a little longer, but our oldest congregation was like an adult child who had lived with her parents too long. When they were given their independence, they found meaningful ways to serve their own neighborhoods, and they assumed responsibility for sustaining the ministry.<sup>104</sup>

Perimeter Church might be the clearest example of what becomes the multisite church. Pope recognized the strategy can help to reach a city, but it can also mature to where it needs to be its own church. Pope believes in multisite but challenges today's multisite leadership, saying,

If any outcome other than healthy Kingdom advancement emerges, then use these sites to become healthy church plants with leaders prepared to build their local

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<sup>101</sup>Pope mentions this meeting in passing in *The Prevailing Church*, and gives more detail in Randy Pope, "3 Reasons We Stopped Doing Multisite Church," *Leadership Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 58-59.

<sup>102</sup>Pope, *The Prevailing Church*, 130, explains, "In our opinion, it is a design that centered too heavily on the senior pastor and the parent church."

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 130-31.

<sup>104</sup>Pope, "3 Reasons," 59.

congregation for the community, and who are willing to say to their people, “Follow me as we storm the gates of hell in our community.”<sup>105</sup>

## **The Growth of Multisite**

Where Perimeter Church might have been the first of its kind, what followed in subsequent decades was a cascading movement of multisite churches.<sup>106</sup> As the movement began, pastors and theologians wrote on the subject. What came from that movement was literature that focuses upon how to launch multisite, how to keep the brand of each campus the same, what elements are shared across campuses, unity factors of the church, etc. However, little attention was or is given to the area of pastoral succession within the multisite church. This section shows that the most well-known works on the multisite church—and the growing research base into multisite churches—have not given attention to the long-term sustainability of the multisite church.

**Popular works emphasizing “how.”** Most writers point to Surratt, Ligon, and Bird’s *The Multi-Site Church Revolution* as the first dominant voice on the multisite conversation.<sup>107</sup> As previously discussed, it provides the most formative definition of a

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<sup>105</sup>Pope, “3 Reasons,” 59.

<sup>106</sup>Dave and Jon Ferguson’s father, Earl, argued for even earlier expressions of the multisite church. Earl Ferguson found evidence of writing on similarly-structured churches “as far back as 1973” with Charles M. Olsen’s “satellite base church.” Earl Ferguson, “The Multi-Site Church and Disciplemaking” (D.Min. thesis, McCormick Theological Seminary, 1997), 18. A little later, Thomas Bartlett’s dissertation found that “the roots of the multisite movement date back to the mid 1980’s.” Thomas Frank Bartlett, “Multisite Church Planting in a Rural Community” (D.Min. project, Temple Baptist Seminary, 2012), 53. Bartlett, as well as many others, speaks of Elmer Towns’ influence on the multisite church by recognizing that he was writing on a multisite strategy in 1990. Elmer Towns, *An Inside Look at 10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches: What They’re Doing, How They’re Doing It & How You Can Apply Their Ideas in Your Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 239, writes that there could be such thing as “one church meeting in many locations.” Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 21, recognize that “three of the ten featured churches [in Towns’ book] have modeled, during some part of their recent history” the multisite model.

<sup>107</sup>Lyle Schaller actually gets into the conversation before this when writing about the Key Church Strategy and how one church can oversee multiple congregations (but it was likely more of a multisite in its primordial state). This also goes with what Earl Ferguson wrote about in his 1997 thesis. Earl Ferguson was on the front end of what people write about today. Bill Esau and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches That Work* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2003), 85, also write about multisite:

multisite church as “one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multisite church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.”<sup>108</sup> This definition has stuck and shown up in multiple iterations ever since. The work itself breaks into four sections: (1) how the movement began, (2) how to launch into multiple sites, (3) how to make it “work best,” and (4) talking about extending the reach of multisite churches.

While Surratt, Ligon, and Bird give attention to multisite models, developing leadership, and other “how-tos” of multisite, they give their most significant thought in Parts 2 and 3: becoming multisite and staying multisite. While recognizing that the movement is not for everyone, the authors do try to help church leaders figure out if multisite is the right move for them.<sup>109</sup> As the book ends, it begins further discussion on the replication of sites and gives leaders ways to keep the “brand” of the church the same: “One of the best ways to do this is to make sure leaders know and understand the nonnegotiables [sic] of the DNA of the overall church.”<sup>110</sup> This brand changes from church to church but usually focuses around worship services, group ministries, children and youth.<sup>111</sup> The other structures: branding (graphic and web design), staffing, HR, etc., are

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At a time when many churches are beginning to think outside the box by adding worship services to an already crowded Sunday agenda or expanding their worship space or looking for a larger piece of property, beyond-the-box churches are expanding their areas of influence by becoming churches in more than one location. Within the box, church leaders think location; beyond the box, they think mission.

The work spends some time talking about the types of multisite churches and some of the benefits. The works above get into the multisite conversation so early that it is difficult for them to speak beyond mere potentialities for the multisite church. Potentialities that many other church leaders are now discovering.

<sup>108</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 18.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 57-59, for a self-diagnostic tool for whether or not a church should go multisite.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 127ff.

all supportive and also must be aligned but not with the same necessity as these externally-focusing areas.<sup>112</sup>

The authors end the book asking whether multisite is a fad. They answer with a resounding “no”:

The future of the multi-site church might be a return to the mindset of the first-century believer, when the word *church* did not refer to a specific building or location but to a group of believers connected to other groups of believers by a common mission. *Imagine the power of a church not built around a personality or a facility but instead built around a mission!* Wherever two or three believers gather, there could be a new campus.<sup>113</sup>

These same men follow with another book called *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip: Exploring the New Normal*. In it, they share what different multisite churches are doing throughout the world. Again, this helps practitioners look “under the hood” of different churches and see what might be happening within multisite. Issues discussed flow from how multisite churches launch church plants and do community outreach all the way to video preaching and new and exciting ways of handling technological advances. Appropriately, albeit briefly, the book ends by listing critiques. However, the critiques are posited more as hypotheticals than actualities, in their opinion. They resolve,

Bad trees bear bad fruit, but good trees bear good fruit, as Jesus said in Matthew 7:15-20. There are actually some churches that we have tried to discourage from going multi-site. When the church is not healthy, it’s not a wise idea to spread that illness by starting a new campus. . . . Cure the sickness in the church before you consider reproducing.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Kem Meyer, communication director at Granger Community Church, speaks about these other communication structures for her church in “Granger Community Church Multi-Site Q&A,” accessed November 12, 2015, <http://kemmeyer.typepad.com/Granger%20Community%20Church%20Multi.pdf>.

<sup>113</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 200, emphasis original. Absent in this response is any pathway for *how* a multisite church could last for generations of leaders. Therefore, on the one hand, the authors would affirm that multisite is here to stay, but they do not explain how they will do so.

<sup>114</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*, 206.

With this thinking, the authors suggest waiting for the fruit of multisite before evaluating it.<sup>115</sup> The only reference to succession comes in the final chapter, “Predictions on What’s Next.”<sup>116</sup> The authors posit,

Multi-site models will help smooth out two typically rough transition points: declining churches and longtime pastors facing retirement. Church mergers, acquisitions, and adoptions are increasingly becoming a staple in the multi-site movement and will transform the church landscape across North America. This will happen everywhere from city churches to rural churches. Likewise, senior pastor succession in long-term or high-visibility situations will find much appeal in the team-teaching approach that multi-site can offer.<sup>117</sup>

This singular sentence is the only time in either of these foundational works that pastoral succession comes up. The authors do not explain how to lead through succession but propose that pastors needing a succession plan might benefit from multisite. It has not been tested why this might be true.

Scott McConnell adds to the multisite conversation in *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement’s Next Generation*. This work focuses on “quantifying the activities currently underway among multi-site churches and providing practical assistance to those churches considering becoming multi-site.”<sup>118</sup> It recognizes, as Surratt, Ligon, and Bird did, that multisite is not for everyone and it should never be a

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<sup>115</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon,” 23, writes, “In short, if the application of multi-site strategies yields greater numbers of genuine fruit-bearing disciples (John 15:5-7), it would be unwise to reject the multi-site church concept.”

<sup>116</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *A Multi-Site Church Road Trip*, 219-22.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 221, emphasis removed. In Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 48, the topic of multisite comes up briefly. They report a Leadership Network survey that reveals, “Multisite mergers have a higher rate of success and satisfaction than churches that merge into one location.” Regarding the concept of pastoral succession, Greear, “A Pastor Defends,” 22, makes a similar remark about multisite: “If our church has ten thousand attenders, we believe that it would be better to have ten campuses of one thousand, who identify with ten campus pastors, rather than one campus of ten thousand who identify only with the one. If the lead pastor passes on, it is easier to find ten pastors to lead one thousand than one who can continue to lead the ten thousand.” However, these comments have yet to be tested as Greear is still pastoring The Summit Church.

<sup>118</sup>McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches*, 2.

substitute for church health or discipleship. These statements are helpful for the multisite practitioner because they focus attention on what should matter most.

Though, as the work unfolds, it offers much of the same advice except that such advice now includes research from Lifeway. This research adds to the book's helpfulness, but one finds many of the same concepts: understanding identity, getting the right leadership, launching, casting vision, and understanding the staff cultures. Perhaps its most helpful contribution is on how to keep the sites together. McConnell finds that multisite churches have several elements to maintain unity. First, they use a multisite mindset: "Each individual multi-site church must choose to put the kingdom of God first and seek to be a part of the way their church is practicing in kingdom advancement."<sup>119</sup> Second, they use technology they have standardized for all campuses. Third, they use the same teaching. In most multisite churches, all campuses are hearing the same message or the same passage. Fourth, they use music: "The style, instrumentation, or arrangements may differ in some multi-site churches, but it is very common to not only be teaching on the same topic but to be singing from the same music."<sup>120</sup> Finally, these churches keep the congregations connected by praying for them, talking about stories going on at other campuses, communicating what is happening at other campuses, and finding regular times for the campuses to meet together.<sup>121</sup>

McConnell's book title speaks of *Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation*, but does not address *how* to arrive at their second generation of leadership. The advice he gives helps churches consider practical implications, but the nuts and bolts

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<sup>119</sup>McConnell, *Multi-Site Churches*, 202.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>121</sup>Multisite pastor J. D. Greear is asking the question on meeting frequency. While he does not believe a group must meet together weekly in order to be considered one church, he does believe that they need to meet. See J. D. Greear, "Why The Summit Church Is Multi-Site," accessed November 21, 2015, [http://www.jdgreear.com/my\\_weblog/2013/06/why-the-summit-is-multi-site.html](http://www.jdgreear.com/my_weblog/2013/06/why-the-summit-is-multi-site.html).

conversations do not develop into how to keep the multisite church going amidst senior pastor succession.

As time progressed and the multisite church continued to develop, some of the most influential thinkers of the multisite movement in North America—Dave and Jon Ferguson—joined the publishing conversation with *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement*. Along with overseeing Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois, they lead the NewThing church planting network and are sought by church leaders on how to create multiplying movements.<sup>122</sup> The book itself is not about multisite—it only devotes two chapters to the multisite concept;<sup>123</sup> rather, the focus is on multiplying ministries on all levels of church life. While the Fergusons mention the value of branding in multisite,<sup>124</sup> their focus is how to get to multisite. Their “seven moves to multisite”<sup>125</sup> illustrate the ways they added sites; however, their moves do not include how to sustain multisite past the founding leaders.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Ferguson and Ferguson oversee the Exponential Conference, which, at the time of this writing, happens twice a year—once on the east coast and once on the west coast. While focused more upon church planting than multisite, much of the leadership that participates in Exponential oversee multisite churches.

<sup>123</sup>Chap. 9 is entitled “Reproducing Venues and Sites,” and chap. 10 is “Reproducing Multiple Sites.”

<sup>124</sup>Ferguson and Ferguson, *Exponential*, 153, write, “In the past people had a brand loyalty to a particular denomination; now much of that brand loyalty lies with the individual churches.”

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 140–48.

<sup>126</sup>It might be that the Fergusons view their eventual succession as the future evolution of their leader development process. What the Fergusons add to the multisite and multiplication conversation is that multiplication starts with individual apprenticeship (their word for discipleship) and then moves to reproducing small groups, churches and campuses, and networks of churches. Previous writers speak of the leader pipeline as an important part of multisite, but *Exponential* begins with the necessity for people to be absolutely committed to using the apprenticing structure in order to accomplish church multiplication. Their leadership development pathway flows from “Individual > Apprentice > Leader > Coach > Director > Campus Pastor/Church Planter > Network Leader.” *Ibid.*, 43. One could say that “senior leader” could be added to the end of the pipeline, but the work itself has not included it.

As multisite became more established in the North American landscape, the publishing wheel continued turning but the conversations stayed congruent to previous works while focusing in on different aspects of the same conversation. Jim Tomberlin, multisite church consultant, developed *125 Tips for MultiSite*, which listed practical advice for multisite churches and those considering becoming a multisite church.<sup>127</sup> He and Tim Cool also wrote *Church Locality* to help church leaders focus on the facilities used for multisite and how that can help direct the mission.<sup>128</sup> Eddy Hall, Ray Bowman, and J. Skipp Machmer wrote *The More with Less Church* to help church leaders consider how they could accomplish great things with fewer resources. In it, they posited that going multisite could help a church with growth issues expand without building a bigger building.<sup>129</sup>

These formative works riding the crest of the multisite wave have been helpful for church leaders. However, they fall short when it comes to churches lasting beyond the here and now. While they offer great tips, tools, advice, and steps to becoming a multisite church, they lack any challenge, help, or process to build on the movement and make it an enduring part of the church landscape.<sup>130</sup>

A newer contribution on the multisite church was published in late 2017.<sup>131</sup> In *MultiChurch*, Brad House and Gregg Allison bring theological balance and practical

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<sup>127</sup>Jim Tomberlin, *125 Tips for MultiSite Churches* (MultiSite Solutions, 2011), ebook.

<sup>128</sup>Jim Tomberlin and Tim Cool, *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings, in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church World* (Nashville: Rainer Publishing, 2014).

<sup>129</sup>Eddy Hall, Ray Bowman, and J. Skipp Machmer, *The More-with-Less Church: Maximize Your Money, Space, Time, and People to Multiply Ministry Impact* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 181, write, “Many large, growing churches combine the more-with-less building strategies of multiple services, multiple sites, and multiple venues.”

<sup>130</sup>Many of the critiques of multisite have been addressed throughout the biblical and theological section. What can be added is that the critiques of multisite do not focus on the model’s sustainability.

<sup>131</sup>Brad House and Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).



applications to the continued evolution of the multisite church. House and Allison believe that the evolution of multisite demands a new concept—“multichurch.” They define this concept as

a local community of Christians that matures and multiplies its influence through launching, developing, and resourcing *multiple congregations to reach its city* with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is one church with multiple congregations or “churches” in a set geographic area (bounded by an identifiable population that share proximity and accessibility).<sup>132</sup>

House and Allison present a new spectrum of multisite<sup>133</sup> and believe that “multichurch is the future of multisite.”<sup>134</sup> While similar to previous works in that the book offers tools and strategies to help church leaders execute multisite more effectively, *MultiChurch* differs in the level of development—specifically theological argumentation, the explanation of the model of “multichurch,” and the interaction with critics of multisite. While briefly referencing that succession could cause issues within multisite, it notes that succession “is a concern for all churches.”<sup>135</sup> Still, *MultiChurch* shows a progression of thought and development of the multisite conversation.

**Growing research in multiplication and leadership.** As the popular literature on multisite progressed, educational institutions researched the movement. Students published dissertations on multisite, and independent researchers investigated different aspects of the multisite church. These works largely fit into two major categories: (1) using the multisite church model for church multiplication and (2) different aspects and issues of leadership within the multisite church.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 16.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>136</sup>Other dissertations, such as those written by Frye, Gaines, and Willis, are not covered here as they focus on explaining the movement (Frye) or critiquing the movement (Gaines and Willis). These

Researchers found that the multisite church model can help reach new people and help churches at capacity expand their reach without building larger single-site church facilities.<sup>137</sup> Charles Carter wrote his doctoral dissertation in 2005 on transitioning First Baptist Church of Windermere, Florida, to multisite. Carter finds that the multisite model “is not only a viable option, but may be the best option for many churches.”<sup>138</sup> Kings H. Lee wrote his D.Min. dissertation two years later investigating key aspects of successful multisite campus launches. In it, he surveyed nine multisite churches<sup>139</sup> to determine key aspects of launching new campuses—but he did not investigate pastoral succession.<sup>140</sup> Thomas Bartlett’s dissertation looked at the multisite model as a way to reach rural communities—specifically to be “a manual for establishing a multisite church in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina.”<sup>141</sup> Bartlett’s method was to “[interview] thirteen people from four multisite churches within a region similar to his own,”<sup>142</sup> and it resulted

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topics have already been discussed with some detail earlier in this chap.

<sup>137</sup>Another recent development being researched involves using multisite as a way to revitalize declining churches. See Christopher R. Schmidt, “A Second Birth: Multi-Site Ministry as a Means of Church Revitalization in the United Methodist Church” (D.Min. diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2017).

<sup>138</sup>Carter, “An Analysis,” 3-4.

<sup>139</sup>Community Christian Church (Naperville, IL), Fellowship Bible Church (Little Rock, AR), Lifechurch.tv (Edmond, OK), National Community Church (Washington, DC), North Coast Church (Vista, CA), North Point (Alpharetta, GA), Sea Coast Church (Mount Pleasant, SC), Westside Family Church (Kansas City, KS), and Willow Creek Community Church (South Barrington, IL). Kings H. Lee, “Case Studies of Key Factors in the Launch of Viable Multi-Site Churches” (D.Min. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2007), 61-62.

<sup>140</sup>Since Lee’s dissertation focused on launching rather than sustaining, sustainability was not a factor in the study. However, one of his findings *might* shed light on why there is so little research on the topic. Lee notes, “The most surprising finding . . . was that at least in the minds of all nine field experts, governance and operating structures are the lowest key factors to determine or secure in the launch of viable multi-sites. Our fifth and final conclusion therefore *is that governance and operating structures may indeed not be a key factor in the launch of viable multi-sites.*” *Ibid.*, 112, emphasis added. It could be that multisite church leaders focus so intently on reaching new people in the current generation that, combined with the focus on leadership development, there is less concern about the movement for future generations.

<sup>141</sup>Bartlett, “Multisite Church Planting,” 14.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

in ten principles for multisite and six best practices.<sup>143</sup> Regarding preaching, Robert Herrington’s dissertation investigated the implications of simulcast preaching within the multisite church. Herrington argues that simulcast preaching can be an effective strategy *so long as* it has proper limitations; namely, that simulcast preaching “should be limited to a localized approach or narrow regional approach and should not be extended online.”<sup>144</sup> For Herrington, simulcast preaching works as a way for a church to multiply its influence assuming that the expression operates in a specific geographic locale. All of the works mentioned have contributed to the conversation by providing the best practices for going to multisite, benefits of multisite, case studies of multisite churches, and arguments for appropriate simulcast preaching within the multisite church.<sup>145</sup> However, the works do not look far beyond the first generation of the multisite church.

The second area within the growing multisite research base covers both positive and negative aspects of leadership within the multisite church—but most do not address leadership succession.<sup>146</sup> Kruckenberg, in primarily investigating Lifechurch.tv, found

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<sup>143</sup>Bartlett, “Multisite Church Planting,” 142.

<sup>144</sup>Robert Herrington, “A Theological and Philosophical Evaluation of Simulcast Preaching Within the Multi-Site Church Movement” (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 239.

<sup>145</sup>In addition, masters-level work looked at the way the multisite model could help Lutheran churches in Wisconsin. Troy R. Schreiner, “The Blessings of Properly Applied Multi-Site Church Planting in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod” (M.Div. thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2014), 55, concludes,

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has been carrying out the Great Commission and taking the love of Christ all over the world for over 160 years without using multi-site church planting as more than a minor model used in certain areas of the country. I am not saying the Synod needs to reinvent the wheel or risk dying out. But with changing times and changing attitudes of people towards church, it is at least necessary to investigate and analyze different methods and styles of church planting to ensure that our church body is using efficient and effective ways to take the gospel to those who are in darkness. Whether their ministry context is ripe for the use of multi-site is up to the individual churches and to the synod as a whole.

<sup>146</sup>Almost every multisite dissertation speaks highly of leadership and the *necessity* of leadership in order to accomplish multisite effectively. However, those works did not begin with a leadership thrust as much as they did on using the multisite model as a way to multiply. For example, Charles Carter’s dissertation focused heavily on how they chose to preach, who made decisions, and how campus pastors functioned within the multisite model.

that on-site pastoral authority of video-venue multisite churches could be diminished because the preaching responsibilities are removed and the proximity to senior leadership changes.<sup>147</sup> Investigating the same churches as Kruckenberg, as well as his own (12Stone Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia), Kevin Queen focused on “replicating the unique culture of 12Stone Church into multi-site environments rather than creating subcultures that compete with the prevailing culture.”<sup>148</sup> Queen finds that replicating culture requires (1) churches to be aware of and communicate their culture, (2) identifying the right leaders and staff, and (3) ongoing training of and reinforcing of larger church culture to staff members.<sup>149</sup> It is interesting that through his study, Queen grew more appreciative of the founding pastor of 12Stone.<sup>150</sup> This admiration for founding pastors is likely true of many

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<sup>147</sup>Brian L. Kruckenberg, “Lifechurch.tv: A Case Study of Effective On-Site Leadership in a Global Multi-Site Church Movement” (D.Min. project, Bethel Seminary, 2009). Kruckenberg looks at other literature within multisite and surveys data from Lifechurch.tv and Seacoast Church. However, he did not find consistency between the two churches in their view of authority. Ibid., 83-84. On p. 89, he summarizes his conclusions:

(1) Spiritual authority is greatly increased through the act of preaching; (2) because the campus pastor does not preach, he is likely not seen as the spiritual authority on his campus; (3) the senior pastor, who is not physically present on the campus, is the primary spiritual authority; (4) campus pastors must find alternative ways to grow their spiritual leadership; and (5) the success of a campus pastor is related to his proximity to the central organization.

Kruckenberg’s conclusions should be taken with hesitation. While some speak of the importance of local pastoral preaching and teaching (Pope, “3 Reasons”), others find value and health in separating the roles of campus pastor and lead teacher (Greear, “A Pastor Defends,” 23). Herrington finds value in both aspects. While recognizing that the role of the campus pastor is essential even in simulcast models of multisite, he also admits that it “seems important for campus pastors to have some preaching responsibilities, even at campuses that primarily use simulcast.” Herrington, “A Theological and Philosophical Evaluation,” 236.

<sup>148</sup>Kevin R. Queen, “Transferring Culture: A Model for Replicating Culture in a Multi-Site Church” (D.Min. project, Bethel Seminary, 2011), 2. Multisite literature is replete with examples of how to keep the larger church culture. Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea: Focus the Message, Multiply the Impact*, The Leadership Network Innovation Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 59, write, “We do several things to maintain directional alignment as a multisite church. For example, we have the ‘Four Ones:’ one vision, one staff, one budget, and one eldership.” This type of cultural unity is what Hammett and Willis have challenged. Hammett, “What Makes a Multi-Site Church?”; Willis, “Multi-Site Churches,” 1532ff.

<sup>149</sup>Queen, “Transferring Culture,” 130-51.

<sup>150</sup>Queen, “Transferring Culture,” 153, writes, Through this study the researcher gained a deeper respect for the entrepreneurial leadership demonstrated by the founder and senior pastor at 12Stone. The founder has been the most influential factor in shaping and forming culture and the healthy culture of 12Stone is a result of the resilience

multisite churches and gives credibility to the idea that churches must consider how to transition these dynamic leaders when their tenures end. Following these, Christopher Kouba writes on campus pastors and what types of campus pastors are needed within different-sized and different-modeled multisite churches. Kouba found the campus pastor job description is flexible based upon the size of the church and its vision for multisite<sup>151</sup> but that all campus pastors can focus on “effective communication, contextualization amidst structure, and leading from the second chair.”<sup>152</sup> Further, Jamus Edwards published his Ph.D. dissertation on leadership structures within multisite churches, specifically looking at how churches distribute authority.<sup>153</sup> Unique in this research is that, while Edwards found campus pastors were content in their role,<sup>154</sup> he also discovered that “slightly more than half of campus pastors expressed their desire to eventually serve as a senior pastor (55 percent).”<sup>155</sup> While this finding might seem insignificant, campus pastors are important within multisite.<sup>156</sup> Thus, a structure relying upon campus pastors for success could increase volatility during senior pastor succession—especially if campus pastors want to move into senior pastor roles.<sup>157</sup>

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and diligence of the founder in cultivating a certain kind of culture for over two decades. Kevin Myers’s entrepreneurial attitudes and leadership has shaped the DNA of the church.

<sup>151</sup>Kouba, “Role of the Campus Pastor,” 40-59.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>153</sup>Jamus Howell Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics in Multisite Churches: A Quantitative Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016). See pp. 132-44 for Edwards’ diagrams of the different leadership structures within multisite.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 177-78.

<sup>156</sup>Warren Bird, “Campus Pastor as Key to Multisite Success,” Leadership Network, 2015, accessed December, 6, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Campus\\_Pastor\\_as\\_Key\\_to\\_Multisite\\_Success.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Campus_Pastor_as_Key_to_Multisite_Success.pdf).

<sup>157</sup>In this same area of campus pastor leadership there has been progress. Kyle Robinson studied succession practices of campus pastors in multisite churches in “Distributed Succession: Managing the Transition of Multi-Site Campus Pastors” (Ed.D. diss., Creighton University, 2017). Through four case

The current literature base for multisite research illustrates three realities for multisite. First, multisite is something educational institutions are starting to watch and study. Second, the literature focuses on aspects of becoming multisite, managing and maintaining multisite, or other features of leadership within the multisite church. Third, the current literature largely focuses on one generation of multisite and does not expand to future generations—the work that does focuses upon campus pastors, though new developments within multisite bring new considerations for the model, its future, and how to lead into that future.

### **The Future of Multisite— Autonomous Churches?**

As the multisite phenomenon progresses, some changes have taken place on *how* a church might use the model; The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, express this shift for a new generation of church leaders. The Village believes that the multisite model is useful for establishing new churches.<sup>158</sup> Matt Chandler pastors The Village Church outside of the DFW Metroplex. As Chandler took the pastorate, The Village Church grew to weekly attendance in the thousands, with four campuses around the DFW Metroplex. The Village mainly delivers sermons through simulcast but also recognizes that a value of the multisite strategy is that it can lead to autonomous churches. In fact, they have already done so with one of their campuses in Denton, Texas. In communicating the decision to use the multisite model to plant churches, the leadership of The Village Church wrote,

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studies of campus pastor succession, Robinson develops an eight-step process that serves churches going through such a succession: “Identify an interim,” “Assess talent,” “Infuse culture,” “Invest relationally,” “Develop leadership,” “Place strategically,” “Test wisely,” and “Relay clearly.” Robinson “Distributed Succession,” 175-78. Still, the issue remains: *how do multisite churches handle succession of their lead pastors?*

<sup>158</sup>In fact, this is something Randy Pope discovered about multisite in the 1980s.

The Village Church seeks to unleash leadership and celebrate the growth of a campus into maturity and multiplication. Transitioning healthy campuses to autonomous churches also reinforces to the entire membership the biblical mandate to multiply through concrete actions. This is a strong and tangible action that demonstrates one way a church can multiply. As a parent celebrates the leaving of children, the church has the opportunity to celebrate a campus becoming a church. What is celebrated is cultivated. The greater hope is to have young churches growing with a burden to sprout new growth and continue the life cycle.<sup>159</sup>

The Village Church has also established their own network—The Village Church Network—to create a support structure for campuses that become autonomous churches:

Our network is only made up of The Village Church, its campuses and churches that were once campuses but have since rolled off from The Village Church. . . . [We] function much like a family, sharing resources and ministry services while upholding one Statement of Faith and adhering to the same theological distinctives.<sup>160</sup>

The Village Church Denton, the first campus in this new model of ministry for The Village Church, launched with a goal to better reach the Denton area—but this church launch would not have happened without first being multisite.<sup>161</sup> Since this first spin-off of a campus into an autonomous church, The Village Church shared a timeline to have all of their campuses become autonomous churches by the end of 2022.<sup>162</sup> The Village Church chose this route because they “believe this move gives The Village Church the best opportunity to reach DFW and beyond with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>The Village Church, “Campus Transitions: Vision, Rationale and Responses,” accessed September 23, 2014, [http://thevillagechurch.net/mediafiles/uploaded/c/0e2769955\\_1389036487\\_campus-transitions-document.pdf](http://thevillagechurch.net/mediafiles/uploaded/c/0e2769955_1389036487_campus-transitions-document.pdf).

<sup>160</sup>The Village Church, “The Village Church Network,” accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/about/the-village-church-network/>.

<sup>161</sup>For a deeper explanation of the process of The Village Church’s transition, see William Beau Hughes, “Preparing and Transitioning a Multi-Site Campus to a Local Church at the Village Church in Denton, Texas” (D.Ed.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016); Joshua Rice Patterson, “Leveraging the Multi-Site Church Approach as a Long-Term Church Planting Strategy at the Village Church in Dallas-Fort Worth” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

<sup>162</sup>The Village Church, “Multiply,” accessed October 16, 2017, <http://multiply.thevillagechurch.net.com/>.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

While The Village Church’s growth prompted some of its move into the multisite model, Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City never desired to use multisite as a long-term strategy. Tim Keller, founder of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York, worked on a long-term succession plan that launched their campuses into connected churches. Redeemer began the multisite philosophy with a goal of using multisite as a church planting strategy from the beginning. In their 1998 report, Redeemer writes,

First, we will become a *single church that meets in multiple places*. In Fall 1998, we plan to open a West Side site, the first of three or four such locations to be started around Central Park. Each site will be “equally Redeemer,” with the same preaching from the Senior Pastor and the same range of ministries, but will focus on its neighborhood and local communities. Next, *during a fifteen year transition period, each site will develop its own pastoral and lay leadership*. The Senior Pastor will continue as the main preacher at all sites equally, but instead of being the main pastor/leader of Redeemer, he will put his energies into mentoring and training a new generation of young preachers and lay leaders who will all lead individual congregations. . . . Finally, these sites will eventually become a *tight network of sister churches*, each of which can be smaller and closer to its neighborhood, yet together supporting mega-church quality ministries . . . .<sup>164</sup>

Frye captures this same thought in his dissertation, hypothesizing, “As the multi-site movement continues to evolve and develop, it is likely that more churches will realize that multi-site approaches are both effective and efficient strategies for multiplying congregations and new churches.”<sup>165</sup> Whether this comes to fruition more broadly is yet to be seen, but it could be a way to create a leadership succession plan that is less turbulent to the entire organization.

## **Conclusion**

Leadership Network published the broadest research on multisite to date. In it, they summarize the movement:

Multisite churches touch 5 million people weekly through congregations of all sizes. Their number includes many of North America’s largest, most visible, and most

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<sup>164</sup>Redeemer Presbyterian Church, *A Vision for a Renewed City* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 1998), n.p.

<sup>165</sup>Frye, “The Multi-Site Church,” 311.



influential churches: 89% of multisite churches are over 500 in current attendance, 72% are over 1,000, 20% are over 5,000, and 8% are over 10,000.<sup>166</sup>

The same study found that most of the churches surveyed were less than five years old.<sup>167</sup> Thus, a movement with millions of people is still in its historical infancy. Leaders must give attention to how to pass the baton to sustain a *lasting* movement or, amidst all of the growth, multisite might be a temporary ecclesiological success. Since the movement is so young, little literature exists on leadership succession within the multisite church, though there are limited examples from which pastors can learn.

### **Leadership Succession**

To understand pastoral succession in multisite churches better, it is helpful to understand three spheres of leadership succession that demonstrate multisite's uniqueness on the succession landscape. First, leadership succession in the marketplace—specifically CEO succession—gives guiding principles for pastors but falls short of fully applying to multisite. Second, church history shows several models of pastoral succession, though none reflect the dominant needs of multisite. Third, modern-day pastoral succession contributes to the conversation, but not enough is written on the multisite church to determine the movement's future successes.

#### **Leadership Succession in the Marketplace**

CEO succession literature moves at a fast rate, as does the CEO succession landscape.<sup>168</sup> Kenneth Freeman summarizes the literature on CEO succession: “Begin

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<sup>166</sup>Bird, “Multisite Church Scorecard,” 2.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>168</sup>When studying CEO succession, Tom Saporito and Paul Winum, *Inside CEO Succession: The Essential Guide to Leadership Transition* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012), 42, found that 95 percent of board members “believe succession planning is a business continuity issue,” but only 47 percent “consider themselves effective at it.” This finding highlights that, even amongst corporate executives, succession is a *necessary* consideration, albeit a difficult one to accomplish.

early, look first inside your company for exceptional talent, see that candidates gain experience in all aspects of the business, [and] help them develop the skills they'll need in the top job.”<sup>169</sup> While portions of the corporate world and corporate culture do not directly apply to the church, one thing is certain—the contributions of researchers to CEO succession should help churches and pastors consider and better implement succession processes. Dan Ciampa and David Dotlich focused their research and writing on the organization’s role in succession “because failed transitions represent an urgent problem that has received too little attention and that must be solved.”<sup>170</sup> How much more so should a church’s leadership consider its role in leading through pastoral succession? Since multisite churches are often larger and require diffused leadership across multiple campuses (sometimes across the globe) and the requisite systems to accomplish this, there is some analog to the senior pastor succession and CEO succession.

**Complexity in succession.** One of the major reasons similarities exist between marketplace and pastoral succession within multisite is due to the complexity of the organizations.<sup>171</sup> In writing on CEO succession, Ciampa and Dotlich discuss the complexity of succession events. They summarize that complexity exists because of “the adjustments required by the individual major players on the company side of the equation and the interactions between them . . . [and] the systemic adjustments in the organization that accompany the transition.”<sup>172</sup> David Clutterbuck, human resources expert in the UK,

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<sup>169</sup>Kenneth W. Freeman, “The CEO’s Real Legacy,” in *Harvard Business Review on CEO Succession* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2009), 2.

<sup>170</sup>Dan Ciampa and David L. Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top: What Organizations Must Do to Make Sure New Leaders Succeed* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 3.

<sup>171</sup>Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, 141, looked at the structure and organization of multisite and concluded, “It is important that a multi-site church be structured more like an organism than like an organization; the structure will have to morph and change rapidly as the dynamics of new campuses are brought into the picture.”

<sup>172</sup>Ciampa and Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top*, 25. Many agree with this concept. Vincent Intintoli, “The Effects of Succession Choice Surrounding CEO Turnover Announcements: Evidence from

agrees. He finds that many human resource departments think inappropriately about succession because they view it as a controlled and “predictable” process rather than one coming from “complex adaptive systems, or even complex evolving systems.”<sup>173</sup> This is why CEO succession is often seen as a case-by-case issue. There is no one-size-fits-all roadmap to succession,<sup>174</sup> but what each case reveals adds to the knowledge base.

**Succession models.** While each case might be different, Richard Vancil (one of the first dominant voices on intentional CEO succession) found that they fall into two major categories: (1) relay successions and (2) horse race successions. The relay succession process focuses on the current CEO who “tries to plan for two laps beyond his own.”<sup>175</sup> The ultimate goal is to leave the company in great hands—and a better position—moving forward. The benefit of this process is “that it almost ensures a smooth handoff of the responsibilities of the incumbent CEO to his successor.”<sup>176</sup> In a horse race, a pool of

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Marathon Successions,” *Financial Management* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 214, calls succession a “complex procedure.” In studying outside CEO succession, Ayse Karaevli, “Performance Consequences of New CEO ‘Outsiderness:’ Moderating Effects of Pre- and Post-Succession Contexts,” *Strategic Management Journal* 28, no. 7 (July 2007): 702, sought to “[improve] our understanding of the complex set of issues surrounding CEO successions and executive team changes.” Another study, looking at pastors, concluded, “Any search for an ‘iron law’ of succession-performance is likely to be futile. The succession-performance issue is clearly more complex than some of the earlier researchers believed.” Marc S. Mentzer, “The Leader Succession-Performance Relationship in a Non-Profit Organization,” *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 30, no. 2 (May 1993): 202.

<sup>173</sup>David Clutterbuck, *The Talent Wave: Why Succession Planning Fails and What to Do about It* (Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2012), 45. It is this complexity that contributes to the difficulty of studying and defining CEO succession.

<sup>174</sup>When reviewing the myriad literature and varying conclusions on CEO succession, Alessandro Minichilli et al., “CEO Succession Mechanisms, Organizational Context, and Performance: A Socio-Emotional Wealth Perspective on Family-Controlled Firms,” *Journal of Management Studies* 51, no. 7 (November 2014): 1153, stated, “We believe these mixed results are found because the outcomes of CEO successions are dependent upon the specific organizational context in which they occur.”

<sup>175</sup>Richard F. Vancil, *Passing the Baton: Managing the Process of CEO Succession* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987), 264.

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*, 264-65. For research into the impact of relay succession, see Yan Zhang and Nandini Rajagopalan, “When the Known Devil Is Better Than an Unknown God: An Empirical Study of the

participants is decided upon and the candidates then race for the job. Joseph Bower does not prefer Vancil's terms, finding that dichotomy false. Bower believes that both relay succession and horse races have elements of the other throughout, and that the processes are not as clear-cut as Vancil makes them sound.<sup>177</sup> For Bower, the succession process will be managed as well as the organization itself, and requires participation from key organizational participants.<sup>178</sup>

**Necessary succession participants.** Most writers on CEO succession agree on which people in the organization must be involved in the succession process—at a minimum, the CEO, the board of directors, and senior staff members.<sup>179</sup> These people all work in different ways to bring about healthy succession, and removing or avoiding one of them might have significant consequences.

A self-aware CEO should be the one to start the succession process with his or her organization.<sup>180</sup> Noel Tichy, professor of business, writes,

Going to the board early before the board comes to you puts the CEO ahead of the curve in preparing the future transition. This is a subtle way for the CEO to influence the process yet not explicitly control the process by 1. setting a timetable, 2. framing the issue, 3. letting the board know it is an important CEO priority and

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Antecedents and Consequences of Relay CEO Successions,” *Academy of Management Journal* 47, no. 4 (August 2004): 483-500.

<sup>177</sup>Joseph L. Bower, *The CEO Within: Why Inside Outsiders Are the Key to Succession* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2007), 120-28.

<sup>178</sup>Joseph L. Bower, “Solve the Succession Crisis by Growing Inside-Outside Leaders,” in *Harvard Business Review on CEO Succession*, 119.

<sup>179</sup>The analogs for the church world would be the senior pastor, elder board (or other leadership committee), and other senior staff members. This puts multisite in a unique category because it assumes a larger staff structure in the church (which is not the case in many churches) and certain organizational systems that could be seen in the corporate world.

<sup>180</sup>Ciampa and Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top*, 153, write, “The incumbent CEO’s primary role in the handoff has two parts: The first is as transition director. . . . Second, the CEO has the responsibility to ensure his successor assimilates effectively into the organization and ultimately moves up to the top spot.”

yet at the same time, 4. giving board members a sense that they have been called into the game early, with ample time for them to provide oversight.<sup>181</sup>

Kenneth Freeman also argues that CEOs who lead the way in helping their organization with succession planning are doing significant work because it “is one of the best ways . . . to ensure the long-term health of your company.”<sup>182</sup>

However, Carey and Ogden find that the process needs not to live with the CEO but rather the board—calling succession “a board-managed process.”<sup>183</sup> While boards are often made of organizational outsiders,<sup>184</sup> everyone writing on succession agrees the board of directors must be involved in the succession process. Ram Charan says, “A CEO or board that has been in place for six or seven years and has not yet provided a pool of qualified candidates, and a robust process for selecting the next leader, is a failure.”<sup>185</sup> Understanding that the board will not be as familiar with the inside of an organization as the CEO, Ciampa and Dotlich give the board three activities: “To provide oversight for the transition; to manage relationships with the incumbent and the new leader, . . . and to pay particular attention to the culture and its political dynamics.”<sup>186</sup> All of these authors,

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<sup>181</sup>Noel Tichy, *Succession: Mastering the Make or Break Process of Leadership Transition* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2014), 109.

<sup>182</sup>Freeman, “The CEO’s Real Legacy,” 4. While many would agree with this statement, letting go of the organization is a hard reality for any CEO to consider. Business and succession expert Marshall Goldsmith admits as much when he recognizes that much of a CEO’s wealth, lifestyle, power, and value comes from the job he or she performs for the organization. Marshall Goldsmith, *Succession: Are You Ready?* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2009), 17-25.

<sup>183</sup>Dennis C. Carey and Dayton Ogden, *CEO Succession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8. Tichy, *Succession*, 169, echoes this in saying, “At the end of the day as well as the conclusion of the annual shareholders’ meeting, the ultimate responsibility lies with the board.” Saporito and Winum, *Inside CEO Succession*, 71, strike a balance in writing, “Although the board is accountable for the process, we strongly believe that there must be a partnership between board and CEO—a partnership built on personal authenticity and trust.”

<sup>184</sup>Carey and Ogden, *CEO Succession*, 8.

<sup>185</sup>Ram Charan, “Ending the CEO Succession Crisis,” *Harvard Business Review* 83, no. 2 (2005): 74.

<sup>186</sup>Ciampa and Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top*, 127.

though attributing varying degrees of involvement of boards, agree that the board's participation in the process is essential.

Though the outgoing CEO and the board have a key relationship in succession, other senior staff members must also be involved. In the marketplace, this is often the chief human resources officer (CHRO) or a similar position.<sup>187</sup> Tichy writes, "For the HR system to support sound succession planning, HR executives take the lead in designing a system defined by rigorous data and checks and balances."<sup>188</sup> Ciampa and Dotlich find that the CHRO helps the succession process by

(1) providing great senior staffing support, (2) giving the new leader the right help from the point that she says "yes" to the point she has earned the loyalty of key managers, and (3) formulating ways for the right relationships to form that are necessary for the transition's success.<sup>189</sup>

The role of human resources (or other executives) brings to light that many remain on staff when the next CEO arrives.<sup>190</sup> These staff members are important for orienting the new CEO in the new role—regardless of whether the hire is inside or outside.

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<sup>187</sup>For specific reference to the CHRO, see Ciampa and Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top*, 179-213; Tichy, *Succession*, 125-59. These positions do not usually have a direct analog in the church. It might be the executive pastor, business administrator, or someone on staff with administrative gifting. They are included to demonstrate that succession is not simply the responsibility of the CEO and the board. In a church setting, it is not merely the responsibility of the pastor and elders—the process includes many others.

<sup>188</sup>Tichy, *Succession*, 132.

<sup>189</sup>Ciampa and Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top*, 185. These activities help the board function in a role they are fit for, leaving staff and those more intimately involved with the organization with a different set of tasks. In discussing succession planning strategy, McCanna and Comte observed that a governing board consisting of outsiders is too removed from the "day-to-day" activities of the organization. Walter F. McCanna and Thomas E. Comte, "The CEO Succession Dilemma: How Boards Function in Turnover at the Top," *Business Horizons* 29, no. 3 (May 1986): 21.

<sup>190</sup>Not all staff will remain after a new CEO arrives, and the same would go for pastoral succession. Wei Shen and Albert Cannella, "Revisiting the Performance Consequences of CEO Succession: The Impacts of Successor Type, Postsuccession Senior Executive Turnover, and Departing CEO Tenure," *The Academy of Management Journal* 45, no. 4 (August 2002): 717-33, studied CEO succession and found that senior executive turnover and its impact on the company's performance varied based upon the type of CEO succession used.

**Internal and external candidates.** Yet another group of succession participants, though not mentioned previously, are the ones considered for the new CEO role. Here, the issue is not whether someone should be considered, but *from where* they should be found—inside or outside the company. The dominant view today is that CEO succession is best handled inside the company;<sup>191</sup> however, any board must know those individuals outside the company who might be qualified.<sup>192</sup> Outside hires might be most fit to take over when an organization is looking to change directions, but inside hires are more aware of the organizational nuances that could make or break a company.<sup>193</sup> Seeking balance between the two, Bower addresses both in his concept of the “inside outsider”:

By *insider*, I mean a person who has grown up, professionally speaking, primarily within the confines of the company. He or she knows it intimately. By *outsider*, I mean someone who has retained a degree of detachment from the company. He or she is skeptical when confronted with the company’s unadulterated ideology—its self-serving, and often self-deluding, bromides. He or she is outside the mainstream of the company and is therefore able to bring what might be called “peripheral perspectives” to bear.<sup>194</sup>

Bower’s concept of an inside outsider is his own but captures what he believes companies are looking for—one who knows the company culture and yet is not so caught up in it that he or she is unwilling to bring change. What Bower and the above authors find is that, while outsiders might be beneficial under certain circumstances, insiders bring the best chance of success.

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<sup>191</sup>Bower, “Solve the Succession Crisis”; Carey and Ogden, *CEO Succession*, 63-89; Deepak K. Datta and James P. Guthrie, “Executive Succession: Organizational Antecedents of CEO Characteristics,” *Strategic Management Journal* 15, no. 7 (September 1994): 570; Tichy, *Succession*, 52-71.

<sup>192</sup>Susan Ellen Wolf, “How to Best Conduct CEO Succession Planning,” *Corporate Governance Advisor* 23, no. 5 (September 2015): 2.

<sup>193</sup>Tichy, *Succession*, 207.

<sup>194</sup>Bower, *The CEO Within*, 16.

**Developing leadership from within.** However, even if experts find internal hires are the best succession candidates, the question remains on how organizations discover them. Research shows that the clearest way for organizations to develop internal candidates is through a leadership pipeline or leadership development process.<sup>195</sup> While each pipeline would look different, the goals would be the same. Tichy summarizes,

Sound succession planning is all about picking the right people for the right jobs at the right stage of their personal and professional development. CEO selection is therefore the ultimate people judgment, which involves people (sitting CEO, CHRO, directors) picking people, in part, on the basis of their past judgments, the most important of which define their own success at picking people, and coaching, training, and developing them to achieve their highest potential.<sup>196</sup>

Clutterbuck does not favor the metaphor of a leadership pipeline because he feels as if it intimates a rigid process.<sup>197</sup> He prefers to speak of what he calls a “Talent Wave,” which includes horizontal impact (not just upward mobility), job transformation, and cross training amongst many different disciplines within the organization.<sup>198</sup> Still, amidst the nuances between metaphors, both recognize that succession is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

One beneficial idea behind a known and established leadership pipeline can be seen in what Carey and Ogden refer to as developing a “succession culture.” They write,

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<sup>195</sup>Bower, *The CEO Within*, 81-117; Tichy, *Succession*, 72-102. Developing this pipeline might actually be more important than hiring people with previous CEO experience. Monika Hamori and Burak Koyuncu, “Experience Matters? The Impact of Prior CEO Experience on Firm Performance,” *Human Resource Management* 54, no. 1 (2015): 38-39, studied CEOs from S&P 500 companies and concluded, We find that CEO experience is negatively related to post-succession firm performance. CEOs who move directly to their new post or have job-specific experience in a similar-sized firm or a related industry show considerably lower post-succession performance than their peers without prior CEO experience, once at the helm of their new firm. At the same time, CEOs whose job-specific experience is in a different context (different industry or different organization size) or who take another job between the two CEO positions do not show any post-succession performance differences from their peers without job-specific experience.

<sup>196</sup>Tichy, *Succession*, 84.

<sup>197</sup>Clutterbuck, *The Talent Wave*, 129.

<sup>198</sup>*Ibid.*, 135-38.



Companies that are effective in succession not only take CEO succession seriously but also have boards and CEOs who require all levels of the organization to plan for the inevitability of change. Some of these organizations have developed matrices for succession involving dozens of top executives and “high potentials” to ensure they are given the proper tools, exposure, and training to develop into contenders for advancement.<sup>199</sup>

Responding to the struggle of developing a pipeline, Ram concludes, “Organizations without meaningful pipelines must start now to put them in place. Young companies should create the processes that will come to fruition in five or ten years’ time.”<sup>200</sup> The developmental process goes a long way in creating an environment where succession is expected and healthy.

**A helpful (but insufficient) model.** When considering pastoral succession within multisite, there are few places to look except for the few churches that have done it and CEOs in the marketplace. Though similarities can be found on the succession types (many pastoral successions are internal relay successions), necessary participants, and the value of internal leadership pipelines, the literature still falls short of capturing what must the church must do. The pastorate is a spiritual endeavor, and the consequences of mishandling Christ’s church are significant. John Piper challenges pastors to realize this, writing,

We are most emphatically not part of a social team sharing goals with other professionals. Our goals are an offense; they are foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). The professionalization of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of professionalism (parity among the world’s professionals) kills a man’s belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them Christ-exalting, spiritual aliens in the world.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Carey and Ogden, *CEO Succession*, 191.

<sup>200</sup>Charan, “Ending the CEO Succession Crisis,” 81.

<sup>201</sup>Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, 3. David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 76, adds to this critique of a professional clergy:

A business is in the market simply to sell its products; it doesn’t ask consumers to surrender themselves to the product. The church, on the other hand, does call for such a surrender. It is not merely marketing a product; it is declaring Christ’s sovereignty over all of life and declaring the necessity of obedient submission to him and to the truth of his Word. . . . Businesses offer goods and services to make life

With this in mind, it becomes important to investigate how the church develops pastoral succession because the church's mission is different.

### **Pastoral Succession Today**

Leadership Network published a study on pastoral succession in large churches (Sunday attendance 1000+), finding that 44 percent of the churches rated their "succession readiness" as "poor" or "fair."<sup>202</sup> This is not uncommon, and Gary May also finds the data similar for smaller churches.<sup>203</sup> One of the first works to speak into the need for succession planning was *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, by Weese and Crabtree. They recognized that churches today must focus on succession planning (though few talk about it) because, unfortunately, churches "often operate out of a church paradigm that worked fifty years ago."<sup>204</sup> Today, leaders must consider succession planning as a crucial aspect to church health and longevity. Within the modern church world, succession literature is not extensive; and looking at church history does not address the current issues facing pastoral succession in the multisite church.<sup>205</sup> However, reviewing the extant work on pastoral succession helps one consider different succession causes and different

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easier or more pleasant; the Bible points the way to Life itself, and the way will not always be easy or pleasant. At most, businesses are accountable only to stockholders and a variety of regulators; the church is accountable to God.

<sup>202</sup>Warren Bird, "Succession Readiness: Surveying the Landscape of Large Church Pastors," Leadership Network, 2014, 1, accessed January, 10, 2016, <http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SuccessionReadiness-SurveyingLandscapeLargeChurchPastors-LeadershipNetwork-Vanderbloemen.pdf>.

<sup>203</sup>May, "An Analysis of Selected Variables," 123. May's research focused upon Southern Baptist churches and found that most he studied (93 percent) found the successor from outside the congregation. Ibid., 115.

<sup>204</sup>Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 5.

<sup>205</sup>For example, apostolic succession focuses on an unbroken chain of authority from the first apostles into today. This is not the case within the multisite church. Frye, "The Multi-Site Church," 201-4. Methodism often rotates pastors on a term-basis through the oversight of a district superintendent or other central leader. Baptist churches often work through a search committee structure only after a pastor has left the church, which does not line up with the usual conditions surrounding the multisite church. No clear process in church history serves as a roadmap for how multisite churches today should practice pastoral succession.

succession cultures and strategies, and key succession principles. There are also several examples of single site succession along with multisite succession.

**Succession causes.** William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird published *Next* with a goal of helping pastors and church leaders begin the conversation on pastoral succession and plan the process. In it, they divide the myriad succession examples into two categories: unexpected and expected.

Table 1. Causes for succession

Unexpected Succession Causes	
Emergency: “Short Term”	“A temporary, unplanned absence that arises unexpectedly and is projected to last for three months or less.”
Emergency: “Long Term”	“A temporary, unplanned absence that arises unexpectedly and is projected to last more than three months.”
Emergency: “Permanent”	“A permanent absence is when the pastor will not be returning to the position.” <sup>206</sup>
Disqualified: “Moral Failure”	When pastors may leave because of “the abuse of sex, money, and/or power.”
Disqualified: “Doctrinal Heresy”	“This includes pastors whose approach to ministry shifts drastically enough that they are no longer a fit for their church.”
Disqualified: “Loss of Physical Core Competencies”	“Sometimes disqualification relates to loss of energy, vision, preaching ability, or other physical core competencies.”
“Forced Termination”	When “the pastor has been fired.”
Expected Succession Causes	
“Ministry Transition”	When the pastor plans to move to a new ministry.
“Church Rotation”	When a denominational authority moves the current pastor to a new ministry role.
“Retirement”	“In many cases, retirement is long planned, but sometimes circumstances prompt a short countdown to retirement.” <sup>207</sup>

<sup>206</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 49.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 50.

These categories capture the major reasons that pastors leave churches. While this dissertation focuses upon *expected* succession causes, the amount of unexpected causes for succession should cause pastors and church leaders to consider emergency succession planning<sup>208</sup> regardless of the ultimate cause for succession.

**Succession cultures and strategies.** Different churches create different cultures and different needs for succession. Weese and Crabtree, desiring to focus on how to accomplish healthy transitions,<sup>209</sup> speak of four different cultures.

*A family culture* expects the pastor to maintain and guide the church as a parental figure who carries the family traditions and heartbeat. *An icon culture* expects the pastor to symbolize in his or her public persona the character of the church and to be the face or voice through which people enter the church. *An archival culture* expects the pastor to be an activist curator. It insists that the pastor be in touch with the great historical and universal traditions of the church so that they can be made relevant and present. *A replication culture* expects the pastor to replicate ministry through multiplication of called, equipped, and deployed leaders and workers.<sup>210</sup>

While critics of multisite would consider multisite church cultures as icon cultures, multisite proponents would consider them replication cultures. Regarding this replication culture, Weese and Crabtree find multiple advantages: (1) “They have significant experience with leadership transitions at lower levels of the organization”; (2) they “tend to have a solid leadership pool”; (3) they “promote from within so that the new leader is someone who is already known and who knows the people in the church”; and (4) they “tend to focus more on leader effectiveness than on personality.”<sup>211</sup> At the same

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<sup>208</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 33, suggest that pastors help the church prepare for emergency situations by answering questions such as (1) “who would be in charge in the first hours of your absence?,” (2) “who would preach on the initial Sundays?,” and (3) “who would carry out your key duties?”

<sup>209</sup>Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 41, define a healthy transition as “one that enables a church to move forward into the next phase of its external and internal development with a new leader appropriate to those developmental tasks, and with a minimum of spiritual, programmatic, material, and people losses during the transition.”

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*, 62, emphasis original.

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

time, replication cultures have some “transition risks,” such as (1) a “lack of senior pastor experience” amongst the potential candidates; (2) “internal competition” that might exist amongst such candidates; (3) and the potential of “becoming ingrown” because most leadership comes from the inside.<sup>212</sup>

Vanderbloemen and Bird add to the conversation not in church cultures but in what they call “leader cultures”—the way a senior pastor leads within the organization.<sup>213</sup> Their cultures are based upon the complexity or simplicity of ministry program supervision, and the “location of power and decision making.”<sup>214</sup>

Each culture requires a different way to handle pastoral succession.<sup>215</sup> Many multisite churches would consider themselves either a “chief of chiefs” model (where a group of leaders oversees other leaders in the church) or a “king (or queen)” model (where the senior pastor serves over a “royal household”).<sup>216</sup> It is in the latter model that many would expect succession to flow from a father to son (or other family member).<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 117-18. It should be noted that it is not only in replication cultures that there is a strong chance of internal candidates being selected. David Yap performed case studies on ten Brethren churches in Singapore. Though these church cultures are significantly different from that of most multisite churches, the dominant pattern was that the churches found their candidates from within their own ranks. David L. T. Yap, “Leadership Succession in the Local Church: A Study of Ten Brethren Churches in Singapore” (D.Min. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006), 89, writes, “The preference for most Brethren churches is to appoint leaders who have been identified with the local church for a period of time. But some have adopted slightly different practices, reflective of their unique circumstances.”

<sup>213</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 71-77.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>215</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>216</sup>*Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>217</sup>Such a transition took place at Bethany Church in Baton Rouge. Bethany Church is now on its third senior pastor. Roy Stockstill founded the church in 1963 and handed it to his son, Larry, in 1983. In 2011, Larry handed the reins to his son, Jonathan. By the time Larry handed the leadership over to Jonathan, Bethany was a thriving multisite church. Another family transition happened at Christ Fellowship Church—a multisite church in south Florida with attendance over 30,000. Tom Mullins founded the church with his wife, Donna, in 1984. He then handed leadership of the church to his son Todd and Todd’s wife,

## Four Church Leader Cultures

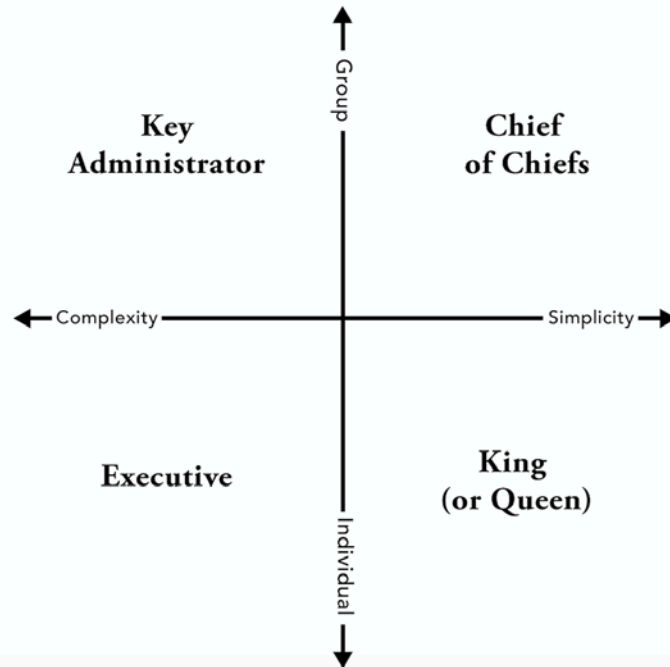


Figure 1. Four church leader cultures

In fact, succession strategies within each church and/or leadership culture align with similar strategies seen within the marketplace. Churches can look inside the organization for a future pastor (though smaller churches may find this more prohibitive). They can look outside of the organization.<sup>218</sup> In addition, some look within the family (which would be a unique internal succession).<sup>219</sup> Regardless of the success (or lack

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Julie. Mullins wrote of this experience in *Passing the Leadership Baton*. Further research on pastoral succession from father to son can be found in Hartley, “About My Father’s Business.”

<sup>218</sup>As previously stated, this was what Gary May found a large majority of the time when investigating SBC churches.

<sup>219</sup>Tichy, *Succession*, 235-69, also comments on developing leadership within family organizations. Tichy notes, “In the United States, close to 70 percent of the proprietors of family enterprises say they would like to keep their businesses in the family, but only 30 percent *succeed* in passing the reins on to a second generation. Only 12 percent in fact succeed in passing their wealth on to a third generation, while a paltry 3 percent of family businesses manage to survive into the fourth.” Ibid., 240. Time will tell if this will be the case for churches.

thereof) of any succession process, each of these strategies is represented within published accounts of modern pastoral successions.

**Notable single site successions.** There have been several notable successions within single-site churches. Multisite churches, though different in their organization, would be wise to learn from these examples. One common example of a positive transition is the experience of Bob Russell passing the baton of Southeast Christian Church. Alternately, a common negative example is that of W.A. Criswell at First Baptist Dallas. Criswell tried to hand his pastorate to Joel Gregory, but did so unsuccessfully. Both churches were large when succession took place (each with membership over 20,000), and both had a pastor who had served for 40 or more years as the senior leader.<sup>220</sup>

Bob Russell started pastoring Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, when he was 22 years old. In 1999, over thirty years into his tenure, he and the elders considered succession planning. This process was influenced by three factors: (1) church membership reporting that people in the larger Louisville community were asking what would happen when Russell left the church; (2) a bank-required \$13,000,000 insurance policy on Russell to help cover the cost of a \$26,000,000 loan (making Russell wonder if too much hinged on one individual); and (3) Russell's reading *Too Great a Temptation* by Joel Gregory,<sup>221</sup> who was set to succeed W.A. Criswell at First Baptist

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<sup>220</sup>Lawrence Gilpin researched pastoral succession in the Presbyterian Church of America where the pastor had been serving for over ten years. He found that planning was a key element in a healthy transition in Gilpin, "When the Long-Term Pastor Leaves," 153:

The pastoral changes in the congregations studied worked best *when there was a specific transition plan or committee in place well before the long-term pastor resigned*. Communication and prayer among the departing pastor and his elders and congregation also made the transitions more effective. In the most problematic succession of pastors, no transition plan was in place. No preparation occurred other than asking the long-term pastor to begin seeking another place of ministry. (emphasis added)

<sup>221</sup>Joel Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation: The Seductive Power of America's Super Church* (Fort Worth: Summit Group, 1994).

Dallas.<sup>222</sup> Russell also mentions Dave Stone, who had been on staff roughly ten years as a potential candidate for the senior pastor role.<sup>223</sup>

Russell approached the elders with a succession plan. The elders made small adjustments,<sup>224</sup> and, on October 21, 1999, Russell presented a succession plan to the church. The plan would see him retire in seven to nine years, with Dave Stone becoming the senior pastor.<sup>225</sup> Over seven years, Stone preached with increasing regularity, received significant leadership training to help strengthen him in his coming role, and both he and Russell searched for another associate pastor to fulfill the support role Stone had played for Russell in the 1980s—finding Kyle Idleman.<sup>226</sup> Stone and Russell worked together throughout the transition to make it as effective as possible.

In June 2006, Russell preached his final sermon as a staff member of Southeast Christian Church. The years from 1999 to 2006 included mentoring, prayer, and continued development of Stone; but the process was such that Russell was pleased with the result and would not make significant changes.<sup>227</sup> Three changes happened in the final year that Russell believes made this occur. First, they ran a “church-wide reenlistment program” to give Dave Stone accurate records of who was a part of Southeast Christian. This dropped membership numbers but ended with people who “were more deeply committed” to the church. He also decided to “turn the reins to Dave Stone six months earlier than had been

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<sup>222</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 15-17.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>224</sup>The relationship between a senior pastor and the elder board is invaluable. Larry Osborne, pastor of the multisite North Coast Community Church, recognizes this well. Osborne builds accountability into the board by (1) presenting them “first drafts, not final proposals,” (2) keeping “no secrets from the board,” and (3) following “the board’s advice.” Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 95. Russell’s handling of his own succession follows all three of these principles.

<sup>225</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 21-22.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 35.



anticipated,” making Stone the senior pastor in January 2006 instead of June (though Russell remained on staff until June). Finally, he committed “not to return to a Southeast worship service for a year after my retirement” so that the staff and congregation could recognize Dave as the senior pastor.<sup>228</sup>

In his book, Russell shares several minor changes he would have made. First, he would have scheduled monthly time with Dave Stone after his retirement: “About three months after my departure, Dave and I quit communicating on a regular basis.”<sup>229</sup> This left Dave without a sounding board as he navigated the positives and negatives of being the senior leader of one of the largest churches in America. Russell also would have better transitioned the elder board. Their board rotates on six-year commitments, so he faced a full turnover of his board during the seven-year succession. Having some of the more experienced elders stick around “would have given the elderly people in the church more security.”<sup>230</sup> Finally, Russell would have sought to help his wife, Judy, with the transition better. She was invested in the church and was not sure what her role would be going forward.<sup>231</sup>

Using the terms discussed herein, Southeast Christian Church went through an internal relay succession. Both those inside the organization and outside of the organization would likely say it was a success, setting the church up for years more of faithful ministry. The church has continued to grow and has even become a multisite church since Bob Russell left staff.<sup>232</sup> However, not all such successions happen so well.

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<sup>228</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 30-32.

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>230</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>232</sup>At the time of this writing, Southeast Christian Church had four campuses—three in Kentucky and one in Indiana. Southeast Christian Church, “Locations & Service Times,” accessed March 12, 2016, <https://www.southeastchristian.org/locations.php>. In 2010, Russell, *Transition Plan*, 38, wrote,

First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, began in 1868. Its first long-tenured pastor was George Truett, who pastored for 47 years (1897-1944). After Truett's death, W. A. Criswell served as the senior pastor for 50 years. However, it was not always the plan for Criswell to stay an entire 50 years; he had intended to leave earlier and had a pastor on staff—Joel Gregory—to be his successor. The idea to find a co-pastor to help him carry the load of leadership and eventually take over the church came while he and his wife were on a trip to London in the mid-1980s.<sup>233</sup>

Through a long search process—one that Gregory believes frustrated Criswell—Criswell convinced Gregory to join the staff at First Baptist as a pastor, with Criswell retaining the title of senior pastor. Gregory explains,

He painted the picture of a transition time during which he would do “less and less” and I would do “more and more.” In order to “keep things going” he would preach at the 10:50 A.M. televised service and I would preach at the earlier 8:15 A.M. service, the 7:00 P.M. evening service and the Wednesday evening service. Then he made a crucially ambiguous comment about time. This would all go on for “a few months just to keep things going.” He would devote “more and more time” to the Criswell College in light of his promise to the Hunt family. . . . The church would be “mine” and he would simply stand by to help.<sup>234</sup>

In November 1990, Gregory became the pastor and eventual successor to W. A. Criswell. As Gregory adjusted to the new role—albeit with Criswell still around and still the senior pastor—he realized things were not as they seemed. Gregory found the church was deficit spending of “at least a \$750,000 shortfall in 1991,” had a history of

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It's now 2010 and Southeast Christian is on a roll again. The attendance, additions, offerings, benevolence, outreach and influence of the church are better than ever. . . . The Lord seems to be pouring out a double blessing on the church. I'm thankful that God sent Dave Stone and Kyle Idleman our way, thankful for the current Elders and leaders, thankful for the Holy Spirit that has anointed the ministry, and I'm thankful I stepped aside when I did, proving that the church belongs to Jesus.

<sup>233</sup>Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation*, 72-73.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid., 131-32. The promise to Ray Hunt was that Criswell would take over as CEO of Criswell College “no later than January 2, 1990,” should Hunt provide the necessary property. Ibid., 235.

overspending,<sup>235</sup> and did not report attendance numbers accurately.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, Criswell's continued presence at the church began to slow any momentum Gregory sought to gain.<sup>237</sup> In fact, Gregory recounts that Criswell's presence and leadership left the staff wondering who would be in charge.<sup>238</sup> However, what finally showed Gregory that Criswell had no true plan of leaving was when Criswell spoke of his fiftieth anniversary at the church—two more years added to the two Gregory had already served.<sup>239</sup>

On September 30, 1992, Gregory stood before the congregation at the Wednesday evening service and resigned as pastor, reading the following:

In November 1990, this congregation called me to become pastor. I assumed that responsibility January 1, 1991. This was presented to the congregation as a transition between Dr. Criswell's pastorate and my leadership. Both the committee and the senior pastor presented an understanding concerning the apparent good will on the part of all parties. I have and do express love and veneration for Dr. Criswell. He has publicly expressed his affection for me.

Recently the senior pastor has announced in several contexts his desire to continue in that role until his fiftieth anniversary. He is the respected patriarch of this congregation. He has the sole right to determine God's will for his life, as do I. In recent conversations with me, the congregational leadership has expressed both their concern that the transition continue and that Dr. Criswell achieve this landmark of leadership. They preferred but did not require the solution that I work this out with the senior pastor in private conversation.

This places unilaterally on my shoulders the burden of solving what the congregation and its leadership might have solved. For me to force the issue and make demands for myself neither honors God nor conforms to my personality. The entire process has left our family in an intolerable situation. Any conceivable future circumstance presents the specter of a divided congregation, a distracted pastor, and a diminishing return. It is apparent that there is double agenda. The ultimate agenda, however, is the prolonging of the incumbent's ministry rather than the enabling of the new pastor's.

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<sup>235</sup>Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation*, 174.

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, 203-6.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>239</sup>*Ibid.*, 297-301.

None of these things can be a surprise to the informed members of this congregation. In light of these circumstances I immediately and irrevocably submit my resignation.<sup>240</sup>

At best, the succession was an external succession that became a relay succession, causing Gregory to resign. After Gregory left First Baptist Dallas, Criswell remained Senior Pastor until 1995 and then Pastor Emeritus until he died in 2002. O. S. Hawkins came on as senior Pastor, whom Gregory believes Mrs. Criswell always wanted to replace W. A.,<sup>241</sup> followed by Mac Brunson and then Robert Jeffress. The period between Gregory's arrival and Jeffress' is not communicated on the First Baptist Dallas website. The website speaks of three leaders: Truett, Criswell, and now, Jeffress.<sup>242</sup>

These two examples are not normative for every pastor or church. Not every church—single-site or multisite—has the size and cultural influence of these two churches, nor the tenures of their pastors. However, one need not be in the role of Bob Russell or W. A. Criswell to have to handle the reality of pastoral succession. Bob Russell writes, “The ability/inability to pass the baton successfully determines the ongoing success of the organization and the leader's legacy.”<sup>243</sup> The importance of how and why pastor leaves his ministry is why these two stories are so often remembered when considering succession.

**Notable multisite succession.** While pastoral succession in single-site churches has been happening for some time, the multisite church is just now hitting a period where they must consider how to transition their founding leaders. Bill Hybles, founder of Willow

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<sup>240</sup>Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation*, 5-6. The press release from the Baptist Press is worded slightly differently in a few locations, but communicates the same information. Herb Hollinger, “Joel Gregory Resignation Stuns First Baptist, Dallas,” *Baptist Press*, October 1, 1992, 1-3, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/7260,01-Oct-1992.PDF>.

<sup>241</sup>Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation*, 138.

<sup>242</sup>First Baptist Dallas, “Our Legacy,” accessed March 12, 2016, <http://www.firstdallas.org/our-legacy/>.

<sup>243</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 48.

Creek Community Church, knows that he will soon hand the church he founded off to someone else.<sup>244</sup> Hybels' succession plan picked up steam in Willow's October 14, 2017, services when he announced that within a year, he would no longer be the senior pastor. At that time, Hybels would hand off the baton of leadership to two people—a lead pastor and a teaching pastor.<sup>245</sup> Willow explains in their church update that

the decision to divide the senior pastor position into two roles became clear as Bill and the Elders began working to craft a job description that was both effective and sustainable. They realized the needs of large churches have changed dramatically since Bill took on the role of senior pastor back in 1975—and a new model of dual leadership, in which each leader can function within their strongest area of giftedness, makes sense for Willow Creek in this new day.<sup>246</sup>

Two other pastors, Jay Passavant and Tom Mullins, founded and pastored large multisite churches and handed leadership to the next generation while remaining one church.<sup>247</sup>

Jay Passavant founded North Way Christian Church in 1981 near Pittsburgh. As North Way grew, it became a multisite church (now with five campuses in the Pittsburgh area). As Passavant was getting close to the time he thought he should transition, he approached the elders and worked on a transition process with a dedicated team. His view is that “this process should be embraced at least three years from the anticipated time of the succession event” and the senior pastor should lead it.<sup>248</sup> That team included people of

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<sup>244</sup>Alex Murashko, “Bill Hybels Shares Succession Plans at Leadership Summit,” *Christian Post*, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/bill-hybels-shares-succession-plans-at-leadership-summit-79787/>.

<sup>245</sup>Willow Creek Community Church, “Willow Creek Succession Update,” accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/succession>.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid.

<sup>247</sup>Another significant pastoral succession happened at Bethlehem Baptist in Minneapolis. John Piper—though not the founding pastor—led Bethlehem through a period of becoming multisite. After a period of elder prayer, Piper approached Jason Meyer about succeeding him (Meyer was currently serving as a professor at Bethlehem College and Seminary). Meyer, 36 at the time, finally agreed to the process and was confirmed by a vote of 784 to 8. Laura Adelman, “The Rocky Road to Bethlehem,” *Leadership Journal* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 72-73.

<sup>248</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 24.

different demographics, staff and lay leaders, and people committed to the entire process as well as committed to unity. This team was responsible for looking at the internal candidates, keeping the congregation informed, updating the elders, and selecting the next candidate.<sup>249</sup>

Aiding the process was a teaching team Passavant developed. The team-teaching culture set the congregational expectation that different preachers would deliver the message; thus, the congregation was not depending on just Passavant's voice for church direction. "By adopting this model," writes Passavant, "my voice as a senior leader was not usurped in anyway [*sic*]. This model was not based in a relinquishment of position, but in a pursuit to empower the leaders God had placed in my path."<sup>250</sup>

Another key for Passavant's succession process was regular and open communication with the congregation: "The key to making this change as seamless as possible is to maximize the amount of information you can safely entrust to the congregation *before* these matters are decided."<sup>251</sup> The goal is to reduce the anxiety the congregation feels and include them in the succession process. However, Passavant learned this key through a difficult process. Before the final succession process began, North Way hired a dynamic teaching pastor whom Passavant determined would be a great senior pastor. Though Passavant recalls,

Because the kind of [communication process] was not in place, and because North Way had not taken any specific steps to clarify the stream of communication, it wasn't long before the possibility of this individual becoming a candidate had been taken off the table.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 27.

<sup>250</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>251</sup>Ibid., 44. This process lines up with what the business world calls fair process or procedural justice. For more information, see W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, "Fair Process: Managing in the Knowledge Economy," *Harvard Business Review*, accessed March 13, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2003/01/fair-process-managing-in-the-knowledge-economy/>.

<sup>252</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 47.

However, Passavant's failed succession candidate did not prevent a healthy process from being developed. With the transition team now established, the church set out to "find a leader that will thrive within an already existing congregation and be able to effectively lead and serve them."<sup>253</sup> For North Way, that began with looking within: "Selecting a candidate who is already known by the church and comfortable with the culture is clearly preferable as it drastically reduces the amount of change and adjustment needed for both parties."<sup>254</sup> With the help of an outside agency,<sup>255</sup> the transition team evaluated four internal candidates, finally landing one of them.

Scott Stevens was the executive pastor at the time, and the committee believed he was the appropriate person to succeed Passavant. That decision happened in "April of 2011" but "would not occur until September 30, 2011." In the meantime, Passavant spent time "helping Scott, the staff, and the congregation prepare for the official transition."<sup>256</sup> In fact, after the succession took place, Passavant stayed at the church (unlike what Bob Russell did) with a goal of helping the succession continue. This entire process created an "enthusiastic engagement of Scott as the new leader."<sup>257</sup>

As Passavant and the leaders of North Way evaluated their succession process, they found it effective in leading to a healthy church with a newly-installed senior leader:

We are well over three years since the formal transition service took place. Recognizing that a healthy ministry is one that continues to grow and reproduce disciples, it is a great joy to report that North Way has grown in every measurable statistical way. At the three year mark since the leadership transition, the overall church worship attendance has grown over fifteen percent, and our financial support

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<sup>253</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 53.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>255</sup>Passavant admits that not all churches desire to employ an outside agency or can afford it; but the process for them was invaluable. Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>256</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>257</sup>Ibid., 71.

has grown proportionally. The sense that God’s favor and blessing remains upon us is truly humbling and praiseworthy.<sup>258</sup>

Passavant's succession at North Way was, like Russell's, an internal relay succession. Scott Stevens served in multiple ministry functions and then had a period of transition to the senior pastor. Passavant calls the process seamless and believes that leaders must start the succession process early in order to lead their congregation to a new season of ministry.

Another internal relay succession—except this time from a father to son—happened at Christ Fellowship Church in South Florida. Tom Mullins founded the church with his wife, Donna, in 1984. It grew into a large multisite church under his leadership, but Mullins was looking for a successor by the mid-2000s. Leadership Network recounts,

In 2011, after more than twenty-five years leading the church, Tom left at the top of his game and passed the leadership baton to his son Todd. Behind the scenes, the successful transfer had been paved by a five-year process of planning, letting go, and preparation of the new leader.<sup>259</sup>

Such a succession may not make sense from the outside looking in. In fact, Mullins had lots of ministry left. Still, he found that his son, Todd, was ready and prepared to lead the church into a new season of ministry.<sup>260</sup> In *Passing the Leadership Baton*, Mullins focuses less on how he led the succession process at Christ Fellowship and more on the principles for succession that any church or pastor may go through.<sup>261</sup>

In 2011 we completed the transition from my leadership to Todd’s—a few short years after our twenty-fifth anniversary as a church. Before we exchanged the baton of leadership, I put together and implemented a five-year plan to prepare Todd to

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<sup>258</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 94.

<sup>259</sup>Leadership Network, “Passing the Leadership Baton by Tom Mullins: First NEXT Book Releases This Month,” accessed March 13, 2016, <http://leadnet.org/passing-the-leadership-baton-by-tom-mullins-first-next-book-releases-this-month/>.

<sup>260</sup>Even though the succession went from father to son, Mullins did not feel as if leadership in the church was a birthright. Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 91, writes, “I will caution you that senior leadership in the church shouldn’t be viewed as something to be inherited! It has to be a clear calling from God.”

<sup>261</sup>Most of his points are found in the next section: “Succession Principles.”



officially take over as lead pastor. It was one of the most gratifying and successful things I've been a part of in ministry.<sup>262</sup>

At the heart of Tom's desire to hand the leadership over to his son was the goal of seeing the ministry of the gospel continue through a new generation. Though he needed to communicate to the congregation that multiple things would remain the same—such as their core values, “team approach to ministry,” and Tom's continued presence at the church<sup>263</sup>—he also needed his church to know it would carry on through a new leader—Todd. Looking back on the transition, Todd writes,

When I look back at our transition, it's easy for me to see how my dad prioritized and demonstrated its importance for our church. Great leaders like my dad see the change that needs to happen and are constantly preparing themselves and their people for that change. It takes vision to look down the road and help others grow in their leadership capacity so they are ready when the time comes. These great leaders constantly model, mentor, motivate, and steadily give their job away so they can take on the next challenge God has for them.<sup>264</sup>

The work of Passavant at North Way Christian Community and Mullins at Christ Fellowship Church reveals that large multisite churches can transition their founding pastors in a healthy manner. While the works published do not specifically address multisite churches and their complexities, they at least illustrate how pastors have led the process—and they give confidence to multisite pastors who want to transition well.

**Succession wisdom.** The above authors help pastors and church leaders in multiple contexts, distilling their experience into their works. These works are helpful and provide many aspects of principles for succession that will help pastors. In an attempt to aid pastors and leaders considering succession, those principles and observations are summarized next.

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<sup>262</sup>Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 15.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., 203.

Bob Russell shared in his work several principles but distilled his experience, as well as his observations, as displayed in table 2.

Table 2. Succession principles from Bob Russell

1. Intentional succession planning has the “best chance for success.”	“For every church that has experienced a smooth transition with no transition plan, there are five that really struggled.” <sup>265</sup>
2. Character is more important “than the timing or the strategy.”	“Just as locks keep honest people honest, a good transition plan with clear lines of authority and a definite time frame helps avoid conflict and uncertainty. The best of plans will fail if the character of the person leaving or the person stepping into the pulpit is weak or carnal.” <sup>266</sup>
3. “Two years of mentoring and transitioning seems an adequate amount of time.”	“If the successor is given ample time in front of the congregation and staff, the church will become familiar with his leadership style, gain respect, and gradually make the transition in their minds over a two year period.” <sup>267</sup>
4. “The departing leader” should initiate the process with the board.	“It’s wise for the preacher to suggest the successor, the strategy, the departure date, and his intention afterward,” even if the elder board adjusts the plans. <sup>268</sup>
5. “The organization should begin early to develop a generous compensation package.”	Churches must consider how to help their founding/departing pastor consider their needs after ministry. <sup>269</sup>
6. “The successor should share the same values, but not necessarily the same leadership style or temperament.”	“The successor should not be a clone. God has uniquely gifted every individual, and anytime someone tries to mimic another he/she is going to come across as phony and incapable of leading.” <sup>270</sup>
7. “A wise successor will practice patience and restraint in implementing changes.”	“Some change of methodology is necessary for the church to continue to relate to the culture and avoid stagnation. But too much change too fast creates an atmosphere of instability in a world that’s unstable.” <sup>271</sup>

<sup>265</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 57-58.

<sup>266</sup>Ibid., 58-60.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>269</sup>Ibid., 63-66.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid., 67-72.

Jay Passavant dedicates a book chapter to each step in his succession process.

Table 3 summarizes those steps.

Table 3. Succession principles from Jay Passavant

Initiate	The senior leader, primarily, and those aiding in the succession, should go through the process “with tenacity, prayer, expectation, and <b>hope</b> .”
Cultivate	Churches develop “a climate prepared and willing to support and celebrate the changes surrounding succession.”
Communicate	Leadership regularly shares “information in such a way that serves to prepare those who this change will most impact.”
Investigate	Leadership looks at “options for the future senior leader based upon assessed church needs and corresponding position description, starting first with in-house candidates and broadening the search, if necessary.”
Integrate	Bring “the selected leader into his new role through information and affirmation.”
Celebrate	The church and leadership should “celebrate the goodness of God as a community, giving specific attention to the service of the outgoing leader and the incoming leader.”
Evaluate	Leadership examines “places in need of additional support and adjustment in the early days to expedite the journey towards productivity and fruitfulness.” <sup>272</sup>

As previously stated, much of Tom Mullins’ work enumerated principles for any pastor or leader to consider when going through the succession process. These principles focus on things such as communication, successor choice, and advice to outgoing and incoming leaders. See table 4 for the communication processes.

Mullins’ advice for what to look for in a successor, as well as how to develop one is seen in table 5. While he recognizes that looking within the organization is preferred,<sup>273</sup> he also knows that is not always going to be the case. Still, his observations apply to internal or external succession.

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<sup>272</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 98.

<sup>273</sup>Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 89.

Table 4. Communication processes from Tom Mullins

1. "Talk to your family"	"I believe your first conversation needs to be with your family. They are the closest to you, and it is always best to pray and discuss such a substantial change with your home team first." <sup>274</sup>
2. "Talk to your board"	After a conversation with family, the pastor considering succession should focus attention on their governing body. <sup>275</sup>
3. "Talk to your key leaders and donors"	Meet with those who are the key stakeholders in the church, sharing the plan and asking for support for the new leader.
4. "Talk to your staff"	Meet with the key executive staff and keep them aware of the succession plan, as well as their role in informing the rest of the staff. <sup>276</sup>
5. "Talk to your volunteers"	"Your volunteers are your core, undergirding ministry of the church. . . . Members of that group will be the catalysts for the enthusiasm and excitement you want to have in a transition of such magnitude." <sup>277</sup>
6. "Talk to your congregation"	At this point in the process, many people in the congregation should be aware of the succession, but now the conversation becomes completely public with the church. <sup>278</sup>

Table 5. Discovering and preparing successors from Tom Mullins

Successor Characteristics	Successor Preparation
1. "They possess character and integrity"	"Develop your successors communication skills"
2. "They are gifted and skilled"	"Allow your successor to show leadership at special services or events"
3. "They practice organizational management"	"Let your successor take over leadership of staff and board meetings"
4. "They are team builders"	"Encourage your successor to manage the finances and develop relationships with key donors"
5. "They are fruit bearing"	"Introduce your successor to other leaders of influence"
6. "They are DNA carriers" <sup>279</sup>	"Put your successor in the center of your world" <sup>280</sup>

<sup>274</sup>Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 54.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>278</sup>Ibid., 61-62. Tom and Todd Mullins worked together for a year after the announcement. Ibid. Thus, their entire communication process lined above took four years from start to finish, with a fifth year of public transition.

<sup>279</sup>Successor characteristics are from *ibid.*, 76-88.

<sup>280</sup>Successor Preparations are from *ibid.*, 94-100.

Finally, Mullins develops tips for the incoming senior leader and outgoing senior leader in order to help them both run the race they have been given are seen in table 6.<sup>281</sup>

Table 6. Advice for incoming and outgoing senior leaders from Tom Mullins

Advice for Incoming Senior Leaders	Advice for Outgoing Senior Leaders
1. “Be patient”	1. “Make tough calls before the exchange”
2. “Be yourself”	2. “Make yourself available beyond the exchange zone”
3. “Develop your vision”	3. “Ask your key leaders to be loyal to your successor during the transition”
4. “Implement change slowly”	4. “Invite your successor into your network”
5. “Work diligently to gain trust and credibility”	5. “Be your successor’s number one advocate”
6. “Build your own team gradually”	6. “Get your financial situation in order” so you are not in a difficult financial position post-succession.
7. “Keep an open door to your predecessor”	7. “Stay relevant”
8. “Honor the past”	8. “Adopt spiritual sons”
9. “Keep a balanced perspective” <sup>282</sup>	9. “Start writing”
	10. “Pray”
	11. “Never retire” <sup>283</sup>

Gary Johnson’s work on pastoral succession planning summarizes much of what the authors in this section say.<sup>284</sup> Like the other pastors who write on succession, Johnson encourages pastors to realize their time is short, be deliberate in planning to and

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<sup>281</sup>Mullins uses relay terms throughout his work. The “Exchange Zone” he speaks of in table 6 is the time where both the outgoing and incoming pastor work together to eventually hand the leadership baton to the succeeding pastor.

<sup>282</sup>Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 107-31.

<sup>283</sup>Ibid., 136-51.

<sup>284</sup>Gary L. Johnson, *Leader Shift: One Becomes Less While Another Becomes More* (Indianapolis: Moeller, 2013).

through the succession, and setting up the successor for success. However, Johnson highlights the perspective of the predecessor—one of diminishing his role while allowing the incoming pastor to grow in influence and authority. For Johnson, the attitude of the predecessor will make all the difference in how the church vies the succession.<sup>285</sup>

**Conclusion.** These accounts—as told by Bob Russell, Joel Gregory, Jay Passavant, and Tom Mullins—as well as the principles they generate, reveal that (1) transition is an issue every church will face, (2) the senior leader can help or hinder the process, (3) an intentional plan has a much better chance of success than no plan, (4) open and honest communication is critical, (5) internal relay succession *might* be the best process for larger churches, and (6) each succession process is unique. If these principles are true, then the more investigation done into each multisite succession case, the better the church at large will be positioned for the future.

### **The Need for Succession Research within Multisite**

Transition in the multisite church will happen regardless of if the leaders are prepared or not. Throughout this chapter, the goal has been to illustrate why more research must be done into succession models for the multisite church. It began by illustrating the biblical and theological principles for the multisite church, followed by the principles of leadership succession. A survey of the multisite church in North America followed, revealing that the movement has only grown and adapted and exists today with millions of worshippers within its doors on any given Sunday. That being the case, there is some urgency to research succession within the movement to best help it endure. Since little research existed within the multisite church, attention was given to CEO succession literature within the marketplace—which leaves pastors lacking the significant spiritual component of succession planning. Thus, the chapter concluded with examples of

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<sup>285</sup>Johnson, *Leader Shift*, 113-21.

modern-day pastoral succession from large single-site churches and multisite churches. These examinations established some helpful principles, but also reveal that no extensive study in multisite pastoral succession exists.

As Joel Gregory finished *Too Great a Temptation*, he hypothesized that “many megachurches of America will face a crisis of pastoral transition in the next decade.”<sup>286</sup> It is true that some churches have had difficulty in succession and hindered the expansion of the gospel, but also churches represented herein have done an excellent job of succession and have established a healthy second generation of leadership.

Vanderbloemen and Bird write, “Succession from first-generation leaders to second-generation leaders are the least likely to go well.”<sup>287</sup> Gary Johnson explains,

First generation leaders are often the founders of ministries. They planted the church that then flourished under their leadership. It is common for first generation leaders to be driven, working relentlessly to launch the new ministry. . . . First generation leaders tend to be the visionaries. Having charismatic personalities, they often do not work well in a team environment.

Second generation leaders are different. They lead teams of people and they value consensus. These leaders foster a team environment by inviting people to provide insights and ideas. . . . Being less driven, second generation leaders pursue healthier relationships, particularly with family and close friends. . . . If transitioning leaders do not recognize these variations, the succession plan can derail, particularly when leadership teams collide.<sup>288</sup>

With a desire to see successful first to second generation succession in mind, an examination of this topic specifically within the multisite church is necessary. The goal is to help more churches realize futures like North Way and Christ Fellowship—to understand how multisite churches can transition from the first generation to the second. Succession in multisite may be difficult, but done appropriately, it can advance the gospel for an entirely new generation.

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<sup>286</sup>Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation*, 313.

<sup>287</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 79.

<sup>288</sup>Johnson, *Leader Shift*, 146.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN

Chapter 1 identifies four issues facing the future of multisite: (1) many multisite churches are in their first generation, (2) pastoral transitions are significant matters for churches, and (3) much of the multisite literature focuses on *how* churches do multisite within their first generation, but (4) how those churches “do” multisite is constantly evolving. Chapter 2 engages the literature concerning the multisite church (both popular-level and academic), church pastoral succession, and CEO marketplace succession. Chapter 2 engages these topics individually because no study of this type currently exists. The four issues from chapter 1, combined with chapter 2 exposing the lack of research and writing given to multisite succession, reveal the need for this study. Research must give attention to how multisite churches transition to a new generation of leadership. Without such research, some multisite churches may only make it as far as their founding leaders.

#### **Research Questions**

In order to broaden the research base for multisite pastoral succession, this study answered the following five research questions:

1. How do multisite church leaders report their succession process from generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession?
2. How does multisite organizational structure influence pastoral succession strategy?
3. What aspects of the inherited multisite church remained after succession?
4. What lessons have multisite leaders who have completed the succession process learned?
5. What do experts in multisite pastoral succession believe are the best practices of a succession plan for multisite churches?



This chapter details a two-phase sequential mixed methods study that served to answer the research questions.

### **Research Design Overview**

Mixed methods research includes investigating both quantitative and qualitative data in order to establish a fuller understanding of any specific phenomenon. Creswell and Plano Clark would add that the “central premise” of mixed methods “is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.”<sup>1</sup> Since multisite church pastoral succession is a relatively new topic in the history of the church, it affords the opportunity to both investigate the current phenomenon (phase 1) and also forecast necessary elements for future iterations of the phenomenon (phase 2).<sup>2</sup>

#### **Phase 1: Survey Data**

Phase 1 investigated the current state of the pastoral succession phenomenon within multisite churches. Since multiple examples of completed multisite pastoral succession exist, a survey was created for an essential member of the succession process at the church to fill out.<sup>3</sup> The survey offered both qualitative and quantitative data about the succession process and was created in consultation with experts in the fields of (1) multisite churches and/or (2) pastoral succession.<sup>4</sup> Phase 1 unfolded in three steps:

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<sup>1</sup>John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 5.

<sup>2</sup>Prior to the process in this chap, the research methodology was presented to the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for approval. The research herein is considered low-risk for human subjects and all participants entered into their portion of the project with consent.

<sup>3</sup>Further definition of “essential member” qualifications are located in phase 1, step 2 in this chap.

<sup>4</sup>Precedent exists for academic multisite research to utilize created surveys in consult with experts in order to investigate specific research questions. Jamus Edwards utilized survey instrumentation to understand leadership structures in the multisite church. Jamus Howell Edwards, “Leadership Structures

(1) population discovery and survey formation, (2) participant contact and survey administration, and (3) data analysis. The result of phase 1 was a sample of multisite churches and the methods those churches utilized to go through pastoral succession as well as certain pre- and post-succession metrics.<sup>5</sup>

**Step 1: Population discovery and survey formation.** The first step of phase 1 involved a concurrent process of discovering the population and finalizing the survey. Leadership Network estimates there are over 8,000 multisite churches in the United States,<sup>6</sup> but the large majority of these churches have not gone through the generation 1 to generation 2 succession process defined herein.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the potential population for this study was all multisite churches that have undergone generation 1 to generation 2 succession.

Since an updated database of multisite churches does not exist, multiple means were used to discover the population. These means were used concurrently. One strategy involved using internet searches to find multisite churches that have gone through the succession process.<sup>8</sup> A second strategy involved reviewing known literature on succession

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and Dynamics in Multisite Churches: A Quantitative Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 99-100.

<sup>5</sup>The original aspiration of this project was to create a census of all multisite churches that have gone through succession. Multiple strategies were employed to establish such a list of churches and survey them; however, the population discovery process revealed too many unique instances to accurately quantify the entire population.

<sup>6</sup>Warren Bird, “Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard: Faster Growth, More New Believers and Greater Lay Participation,” Leadership Network, 2014, 3, accessed July 15, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014\\_LN\\_Generis\\_Multisite\\_Church\\_Scorecard\\_Report\\_v2.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014_LN_Generis_Multisite_Church_Scorecard_Report_v2.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>Important in this definition is that succession is an intentional process. Thus, multisite churches that have lost their Gen 1 pastor but not due to an intentional succession process (e.g., Mars Hill [with Mark Driscoll], The Journey Church [Darrin Patrick], NewSpring [Perry Noble]) are not included in the population.

<sup>8</sup>William Vanderbloemen, telephone interview with author, March 3, 2016, encouraged internet-searching as a mechanism for finding these churches.

to find examples of multisite succession. A third strategy included a week-long Twitter campaign that involved soliciting stories of succession by (1) telling known stories of succession, (2) mentioning stories and leaders involved, and (3) asking for contacts of more churches. The fourth strategy produced the most examples of succession, and it involved snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is the solicitation of people within or related to a population who then provide examples of the phenomenon being researched (or potential examples of the phenomenon). Researchers then follow up with the examples given to (1) confirm that the examples fit the population and/or (2) receive further names of examples that might fit the population.

In order to establish a list of contacts for snowball sampling, a database was created in Google Sheets. This database consisted of leaders at local churches (both multisite and single-site), denominational leaders, and church consultants in the following groups:

1. Multisite churches in *Outreach Magazine*'s list of fastest-growing churches.<sup>9</sup>
2. Multisite churches throughout the country based upon internet searching.<sup>10</sup>
3. Certain single-site church leaders who might be aware of the phenomenon being researched.
4. Church planting network leaders of Acts 29 and the New Thing Network.
5. Key leaders of annual conferences of the United Methodist Church.
6. District superintendents of the Evangelical Free Church of America.
7. Church planting strategists of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>11</sup>
8. Multisite church consultants.

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<sup>9</sup>In order to help build a database of these churches, I consulted researcher Jamus Edwards, who used this population in his own research.

<sup>10</sup>In order to build this list more quickly, I employed a small group of researchers and delegated to them a group of states in the United States. This group's task was to spend one to two hours researching multisite churches within their group of states and add churches and a key contact at those churches.

<sup>11</sup>These leaders were often found in the southern United States.

The final list of candidates for sampling included just over 400 unique contacts. These contacts were then emailed with an introduction of the research, examples of succession, and a request for names of churches.<sup>12</sup> In most instances the contacts either did not reply back or replied back that they were interested in the study but unfortunately had no examples. However, a handful of these contacts either (1) provided a name or name of churches to consider or (2) forwarded the request on to other leaders at their church or at other churches who might know of examples.

These strategies—internet research, literature review, a Twitter campaign, and snowball sampling—produced a list of 77 churches that may or may not have gone through succession but deserved further follow-up. Following up with these churches and succession stories led to a potential list of 42 churches that fit the definition of the population. Research on those 42 examples led to a list of 35 confirmed succession stories.<sup>13</sup>

While the database of multisite churches developed, a concurrent process of survey development occurred. A draft of the Multisite Pastor Succession Survey<sup>14</sup> was generated through a comprehensive evaluation of the literature base and in consultation with a survey design expert at Louisiana State University.<sup>15</sup> That consultation resulted in a forty-seven-item survey broken up into six parts. However, finalizing a survey of this scope required experts in the fields of the multisite church and/or pastoral succession. This expert panel was necessary because the phenomenon of pastoral succession within multisite is still relatively new and the literature base is in its infancy.

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<sup>12</sup>See appendix 3 for the snowball sampling request email. In only a small number of instances, contact information was bad or the contact was not used.

<sup>13</sup>See appendix 6.

<sup>14</sup>See appendix 2.

<sup>15</sup>This person is not an expert in multisite churches or pastoral succession but rather an expert in constructing surveys to gather data required for analysis.

Experts for this panel included those who satisfied at least one of the following qualifications:

1. Researchers who have published in the field of pastoral succession.
2. Researchers who have published in the field of the multisite church.
3. Pastors who are serving as the Gen 1 pastor of a multisite church and have held that position for a minimum of ten years.
4. Persons who have served as consultants for multisite churches going through pastoral succession planning.
5. Persons who are or have served on the governing board of a multisite church with a first generation multisite leader for a minimum of five years.
6. Gen 1 pastors who have transitioned their multisite church to a new generation of leadership.

These criteria were appropriate for phase 1 because the expertise on the multisite church is divided over multiple disciplines (practitioners, theologians, empirical researchers, consultants, and governing board members). Every combination of these disciplines brought unique contributions to the survey and provided a stronger final version.

Fourteen panelists meeting the criteria were contacted and agreed to provide feedback on the survey.<sup>16</sup> A unique Google Sheet was created for each panelist with an overview of the research questions and a draft of the Multisite Pastor Succession Survey. The expert panel was asked to rate on a four-point scale the importance of each item to the topic of succession.<sup>17</sup> Experts could also provide revisions on any given question or offer questions that they believed were necessary to add to the survey. Of the fourteen panelists, nine completed the ratings, two offered email feedback only, one seconded a colleague's ratings, and two offered no response.

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<sup>16</sup>See appendix 1.

<sup>17</sup>A fifth option of "NA" was given in instances where a panel member felt as if the question was beyond his or her expertise.

The goal of the first round of these surveys was to discover consensus on the most essential survey elements and make any adjustments to the final survey. Consensus to an item's value was determined by 70 percent of the panel submitting a response rating the item as "3" or higher.<sup>18</sup> Questions that did not gain consensus were removed or adjusted. Further, revisions to item wording or response choices were made based upon panelist feedback. This process resulted in a forty-six item survey.<sup>19</sup> This survey was then put into a Word document and sent back to panelists for any necessary feedback before considering the survey as complete in regard to questions and responses.

In order to further develop the final form of a survey before administration, a pilot test was administered. Pilot testing assists in finding any significant issues in question clarity, completion time, or other variables that may prohibit successful implementation. In most instances, pilot testing happens amongst the exact population being researched; however, with such a small sample to research, any population loss would hinder results. Thus, the pilot test for the succession survey included five staff members of multisite churches who were familiar with multisite churches and had available time to offer feedback on the survey content. The forty-six-item survey provided from the expert panel was developed in SurveyMonkey's software, instructions were added, and the survey was sent to the group of five for pilot testing. Those who pilot-tested were given opportunity to provide feedback on item construction, instructions, or any other aspects that seemed unclear. After feedback from this group, the Multisite Pastoral Succession Survey reached its final form.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>John Beck Cartwright used the same determination of consensus in his thesis. John Beck Cartwright, "Best Practices for Online Theological Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 51.

<sup>19</sup>The responses to the survey were positive. Almost all items received consensus and only a few items were given for any adjustments.

<sup>20</sup>See appendix 2.

**Step 2: Participant contact and survey administration.** After the identification of the church population was finalized<sup>21</sup> and the survey was in its final form, churches were contacted to officially participate in the study. As in step 1, the elements of step 2 happened concurrently. Contact was made with each church to ensure participation in the study and then the survey was administered to qualified participants.

Requests for survey participation were made to each church with a confirmed succession. In most instances, a senior leadership team member of Gen 2 pastors was the one contacted.<sup>22</sup> The contact came as an email and explained the importance of the study for the future of the multisite church and the value of that church's contribution to the succession conversation.<sup>23</sup> The email included the Dissertation Study Participation Form<sup>24</sup> that the pastor or survey respondent had to sign, giving consent for his or her church to be considered in the study. Since it was assumed that some churches would not feel comfortable with the church being uniquely identified in data presentation, thus hindering participation, the form confirmed that all published results would be anonymous but that a list of all churches would be put into an appendix. In the event that contacts did not respond to the first email, subsequent attempts for contact and consent were made. During step 2, 24 churches of 35 consented to take the survey.

After the participation form had been completed and returned, the survey was scheduled to be sent to the designated respondent. Survey respondents had to be one of the following people: (1) the Gen 1 pastor, (2) the Gen 2 pastor, (3) a senior pastoral staff member who was part of the succession process, or (4) a governing board member who was part of the succession process. In general, a two-day delay came between survey

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<sup>21</sup>The finalized list from step 1 was added to throughout survey administration in step 2.

<sup>22</sup>The research required the church as an organization to agree to participate in the survey, and the Gen 1 pastor may not have been an official representative of the church.

<sup>23</sup>See appendix 4.

<sup>24</sup>See appendix 5.

consent and sending the survey. This delay occurred because the survey requested metric data that could be difficult to track down. Thus, once respondents consented, the survey was scheduled and a follow-up email was sent to inform respondents on when they would receive the survey and what data would be beneficial to have on hand when taking the survey. The survey for each respondent remained open until analysis had to begin and phase 2 developed. In total, 21 of the 24 consenting churches completed the survey.

**Step 3: Data analysis.** The survey blended qualitative and quantitative items to provide a snapshot of the succession phenomenon. Certain items focused on the process of succession (length of time, communication strategies, etc.), while others focused on specific variables within the process (giving, attendance, baptisms, number of campuses before succession, etc.). The survey concluded with open-ended questions to help better understand particular issues within each succession event. Thus, analysis consisted of three types: (1) presentation of succession phenomenon information, (2) t-test analysis of longitudinal data, and (3) review of open-ended responses. This research used Jamus Howell Edwards' Ph.D dissertation on campus pastors in the multisite church as a guide for how to present the survey data.<sup>25</sup>

First, succession information was tabulated in order to investigate broader details of the succession processes in each of the churches surveyed. Analysis included presentation of the most significant data from the results, including (1) average age of Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors, (2) length of succession process, (3) number of campuses that existed before succession, (4) percentage of churches using internal versus external hires, (5) previous ministry roles of the Gen 2 pastors, and (6) metric trends leading into succession year. This type of information does not currently exist for the population, so analysis and presentation highlighted some of the current trends in succession amongst

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<sup>25</sup>Edwards' research did not emphasize the longitudinal data, but his work had a similar approach to survey construction, expert feedback, and presentation of data.



multisite churches. To support this analysis, certain response data were cross-tabulated in order to determine how certain churches approached succession based upon unique aspects of the church. Further, items within the survey that sought organizational structure information (number of campuses, location of campuses, sermon delivery method) were compared to see the approaches to succession employed by these churches.

Second, a two-sample, unpaired, two-tailed student's t-test was run on the longitudinal quantitative items in order to determine significance of succession upon the longitudinal data in each individual church. This data looked at annual giving, number of baptisms, and average weekly attendance for the three years leading up to succession and the three years since succession. Churches that provided all or most of the seven years of data necessary were considered for analysis. An engineer who is a certified Six Sigma black belt was sent the data, which was imported into Minitab and evaluated with a 95 percent confidence level.

Third, the open-ended responses at the end of the survey were presented and summarized thematically to better understand the lessons these respondents learned in their succession processes. These themes emerged primarily after importing the responses into a table and categorizing them for word frequency.<sup>26</sup> The themes generated were then used to develop the structures needed to build phase 2.

## **Phase 2: Delphi Panel on Succession**

While phase 1 addressed research questions 1 through 4, the second phase of this research addressed research question 5: What do experts in multisite pastoral succession believe are the best practices of a succession plan for multisite churches? Multisite pastoral succession is a new topic, and, as such, limited research exists about it. In order to help future iterations of leaders go through successful transitions, a reliable set

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<sup>26</sup>Unlike the data presented in phase 2, the open-ended questions in phase 1's survey did not produce data requiring significant coding or software.

of best practices should exist; and the Delphi method was implemented in order to better understand the topic.

Gregory Skulmoski, Frances Hartman, and Jennifer Krahn define the Delphi method as “an iterative process to collect and distill the anonymous judgments of experts using a series of data collection and analysis techniques interspersed with feedback.” Further, they write that the Delphi method is particularly valuable “when there is incomplete knowledge about a problem or phenomenon.”<sup>27</sup> When seen in light of multisite pastoral succession, the Delphi method serves as an appropriate—and necessary—tool to uncover best practices of succession in a multisite church.

Yousuf is correct when he writes, “The outcome of a Delphi sequence is nothing but opinion; the results of the sequence are only as valid as the opinions of the experts who made up the panel.”<sup>28</sup> While the Delphi method does not supply fact, the method, with the right experts, can produce reliable results. Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn speak of two types of expert groups: homogenous and heterogeneous.<sup>29</sup> In the case of multisite pastoral succession, the expert panel was homogeneous, and thus the panel size itself remained small—11 of the 12 panelists responded in round 1, and 10 of the 11 panelists responded in rounds 2 and 3. However, unlike the qualifications for the panel in

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<sup>27</sup>Gregory J. Skulmoski, Francis T. Hartman, and Jennifer Krahn, “The Delphi Method for Graduate Research,” *Journal of Information Technology Education* 6 (2007): 1, accessed September 16, 2016, [http://wiki.cbrnecc.ca/images/e/ef/JITEv6p001-021Skulmoski212\\_Delphi.pdf](http://wiki.cbrnecc.ca/images/e/ef/JITEv6p001-021Skulmoski212_Delphi.pdf). Muhammad Imran Yousuf shares a similar view and sees similar value in the Delphi method: “The Delphi technique, by definition, is a group process involving an interaction between the researcher and a group of identified experts on a specified topic, usually through a series of questionnaires. Delphi has been used to gain a consensus regarding future trends and projections using a systematic process of information gathering. The technique is useful where the opinions and judgments of experts and practitioners are necessary.” Muhammad Imran Yousuf, “Using Experts’ Opinions through Delphi Technique,” *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 12, no. 4 (May 2007): 1.

<sup>28</sup>Yousuf, “Using Experts’ Opinions,” 5. An explanation of each round can be found in Chia-Chien Hsu and Brian A. Sandford, “The Delphi Technique: Making Sense of Consensus,” *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 12, no. 10 (August 2007): 2-3.

<sup>29</sup>Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, “The Delphi Method,” 10.

phase 1, the qualifications for phase 2 were narrower because the information sought was specific. Qualified panelists had to meet one of the following criteria:

1. They served as the Gen 1 Pastor at a multisite church that has gone through pastoral succession.
2. They were serving or had served as the Gen 2 Pastor at a multisite church that has gone through pastoral succession.
3. They were serving or had served as a governing board member OR a member of a pastoral leadership team for the duration of a generation 1 to generation 2 succession process.
4. They served as a consultant for multisite churches that have gone through the pastoral succession process.

The four categories developed through both the formation of the survey for phase 1 and the interaction with pastors in phase 2. Respondents to phase 1 who demonstrated the greatest desire to further help with research efforts were asked to participate in phase 2. Official requests for participation were made through email to 12 qualified panelists with an explanation of the study and what the expert's contribution could be.<sup>30</sup> Panelists were given an overview of the needed time commitment as well as remuneration.<sup>31</sup> All 12 panelists agreed to start the study.<sup>32</sup>

**Round 1: Questionnaire and analysis.** Hsu and Sandford explain, “In the first round, the Delphi process traditionally begins with an open-ended questionnaire.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See appendix 8.

<sup>31</sup>Panelists who completed the project were offered \$75 for their participation.

<sup>32</sup>During the construction, research, and writing on phase 2, two dissertations were consulted. Neal Brian Ledbetter's Ph.D. diss. on best practices of spiritual formation in online education and John Beck Cartwright's Ed.D. thesis on best practices for online theological ministry preparation. Neal Brian Ledbetter, “Best Practices of Online Undergraduate Spiritual Formation at Select Institutions of Christian Higher Education: A Delphi Study” (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Cartwright, “Best Practices.” Ledbetter learns from Cartwright's methodology and develops the methodology for his own study. These two dissertations were beneficial for this study because they both used the Delphi method to develop research in relatively new fields that were made possible, in part, because of technological advances.

<sup>33</sup>Hsu and Sandford, “The Delphi Technique,” 2.

For round 1 of the panel, a questionnaire was formulated based upon the (1) succession literature and (2) survey results. This questionnaire originally included thirteen questions over four categories—Gen 1 practices, Gen 2 practices, organizational practices, and communication practices. Prior to sending these questions to the panelists, three church consultants familiar with multisite succession offered feedback on the questions, with the result being a three-category questionnaire of eleven questions. The final three categories were: (1) Gen 1 practices, (2) Gen 2 practices, and (3) organizational practices.<sup>34</sup>

The questions asked pertained to specific categories of the succession planning process that have been discovered as essential for succession. In general, the questions focused upon (1) preparation for succession made by the church and the pastors (both organizational and personal preparation), (2) communication practices for succession, and (3) plans for Gen 1 and 2 pastors after the transfer of authority. These questions were developed in SurveyMonkey and round 1 was emailed to all panelists in November 2017.<sup>35</sup>

Panelists took roughly two weeks to respond, and 11 of the 12 panelists completed round 1. Results of the survey were exported as PDFs by question type and imported into NVivo with a total of eleven files (one per question).<sup>36</sup> These PDFs were also sent back to the panelists so that they could review the responses and make any desired revisions. Each panelist received the anonymous responses with their specific answers highlighted.

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<sup>34</sup>See appendix 7. “Communication practices” was removed as a category because (1) both the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors are regular communicating during succession and (2) communication practices are a subset of organizational practices.

<sup>35</sup>See appendix 9.

<sup>36</sup>Cartwright, “Best Practices,” 49-50, uses a similar method of round 1 analysis—categorizing responses into the four learning outcomes for online M.Div. programs and finding themes based upon pre-defined learning outcomes. Shane R. Brady, “Utilizing and Adapting the Delphi Method for Use in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 14, no. 5 (December 2015): 1-6, argues that qualitative Delphi studies need appropriate rigor in order for the results to be reliable, and Cartwright’s method produces this type of rigor.

NVivo utilizes the creation of nodes to code responses of qualitative data. Responses were investigated for unique themes and shared words and/or ideas. Since research question 5 looks for *best practices* of succession, reviewing responses and finding consistent themes was addressed by (1) looking at responses to individual questions side-by-side, (2) running word frequency queries on each of the eleven categories, (3) reviewing word trees for themes—focusing upon verbs, and (4) establishing an initial bank of nodes as responses were read. Coding methodology was based upon a modified version of process coding. Johnny Saldaña describes process coding as a process that “uses gerunds . . . exclusively to connote action in the data.”<sup>37</sup> Codes created in round 1 were not *exclusively* gerunds, however. Rather, codes were gerunds, other verbs, or nouns with verbal implications.<sup>38</sup> This coding methodology ensured that the focus of the nodes stayed on *practices* (demonstrated by verbs). At the conclusion of round 1, each category generated for the questionnaire was translated into specific thematic statements.

After the first review and coding of the statements, 103 thematic statements emerged. During open-ended responses, panelists often addressed these in different areas.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the 103 thematic statements were compared to one another and reduced, when possible, into one statement. This process reduced the list by ten. At the end of round 1, 93 thematic statements were categorized by question category and put into an Excel spreadsheet. A final review was made by comparing thematic statements in Excel to the

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<sup>37</sup>Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 111.

<sup>38</sup>For example, one node was “prayer,” but the node referred to actively praying during the succession process.

<sup>39</sup>For example, a panelist might answer one question that resulted in a certain thematic statement. A second panelist might answer a different question in a similar thematic statement. Rather than have two similarly-worded statements, the statements were combined into one.

nodes in each question. Comparison was made in order to tally the number of respondents that addressed any specific statement.

**Round 2: Survey and analysis.** Round 2 was the first attempt at finding consensus. The statements about succession were organized based upon the categories for which they were created and then put into a SurveyMonkey survey with a Likert-type scale for each statement. The scale was from “1” to “4,” with panelists asked to rank the importance of each statement.<sup>40</sup> As with phase 1, round 2 defined consensus as at least 70 percent of the panel rating an item as “3” or higher. At the end of the round 2 survey, the data was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet combined all panelist answers and categorized them by different consensus thresholds—70 percent through 100 percent.<sup>41</sup> Items that did not gain consensus were removed from the survey. Ten of the 11 panelists responded to round 2, and the 93 thematic statements were reduced to 76 statements at the end of round 2. These statements were then reviewed for mean rating and standard deviation to help weight the responses for data presentation.

**Round 3: Survey and analysis.** Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn note that homogeneous groups may find consensus in “fewer than three rounds.”<sup>42</sup> However, since opportunities still existed for revision after round 2, the panelists were presented with a third round. An email was sent to the panelists that contained (1) the results from round 2, (2) the statements where each panelist stood outside of consensus in that round with a

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<sup>40</sup>See appendix 10.

<sup>41</sup>The spreadsheet was built to ensure that panelists who did not respond to any practice were not counted in the 70 percent threshold. Thus, no response from a panelist simply reduced the number of viable answers for a question—this strategy explains why some percentages in chapter 4 appear inconsistent with the regular results. Consensus thresholds were not necessary in this study, but the thresholds helped to determine how many statements gained consensus—and at what level of agreement amongst panelists.

<sup>42</sup>Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn, “The Delphi Method,” 11.

request for any justification,<sup>43</sup> and (3) a link to round 3's survey.<sup>44</sup> These statements were divided into "agree" and "disagree" categories rather than rating from "1" to "4." As with round 2, consensus was 70 percent of the panelists selecting "agree" to each item. As anticipated, the 10 respondents from round 2 all completed round 3 and all 76 practices found consensus.

**Conclusion of Delphi.** At the end of the Delphi process, the list of 76 best practices was completed. These practices were discovered through multiple rounds of open-ended feedback and survey data through interaction with a homogenous expert panel. To close out phase 2, panelists who accepted the agreed-upon remuneration of \$75 were sent their payment and a follow-up thank you.

### **Research Instrumentation**

There are two instruments for this study. The instrument for phase 1 is a survey, generated from interaction with an expert panel. The survey was used to provide information about how different multisite churches approached the phenomenon of senior pastor succession. The expert panel's interaction was utilized to hone the survey and ensure it included the necessary items to receive an appropriate picture of how churches within the population executed the succession process. The survey asked for (1) demographic information about the church; (2) information about how the succession process was initiated and finally executed; (3) pre- and post- succession metrics; and (4) open-ended responses to better understand the succession process.

Phase 2's instrumentation was a set of open-ended and follow-up questions given to a Delphi panel compiled of 12 experts on multisite pastoral succession. The panel went through three rounds of interaction in order to find consensus on best practices

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<sup>43</sup>See appendix 11 for consensus justifications.

<sup>44</sup>See appendix 12.

of multisite pastoral succession. The first round included open-ended questions developed through investigating succession literature and interaction with three succession consultants. Eleven of the 12 panelists completed the first round. The second round included 93 specific statements that panelists were asked to rank “1” to “4” on a Likert-type survey. This process reduced the 93 practices to 76. The third round of items asked respondents to “agree” or “disagree.” Consensus for this instrument was defined as 70 percent of the panelists ranking items as “3” or more in round 2 and 70 percent of the panelists ranking items as “agree” in round 3.

### **Sampling**

Since phase 1 allowed for any multisite church that fit the definition of succession to participate, all multisite churches in North America that have gone through pastoral succession (and were able to be discovered) applied. Through the population discovery means described during phase 1, this project found 35 multisite churches that had completed the succession process. Twenty-one of these churches completed the survey. Though this population is not large, the survey data gives the most up-to-date succession information (at the time of publishing this dissertation) about multisite succession. With roughly 8,000 multisite churches in North America, and generation 1 pastors still serving in the large majority of them, the population was sufficiently definable.

Phase 2’s sample was a homogenous expert panel composed of church leaders who have uniquely participated in generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession in a multisite church. Since utilization of a Delphi panel is flexible based upon the research outcomes, this study used purposive sampling of qualified participants. Phase 1 uncovered multiple qualified experts to contribute to the phase 2 panel. Preparation of phase 1’s survey, snowball sampling to discover the population, and interaction with pastors who were part of the succession and/or took the survey, provided a strong group of potential



panelists. Twelve panelists agreed to the study, 11 finished round 1, and 10 finished rounds 2 and 3.

### **Limitations of Generalizations of Findings**

The information found in phase 1 represented as much of the population as possible, yet the precise number of multisite churches that have gone through succession was difficult to quantify. Many of the findings should generalize well to multisite churches who are approaching succession. The specific limitations of the research population and the specific qualifications of the expert panel in phase 2 limits generalization in three ways. First, this research targets multisite churches with at least two geographical campuses. Thus, the research is not able to generalize to single-site churches or multisite churches that have multiple venues on the same campus. Second, the research investigates multisite churches in North America, meaning that the research will not generalize well to multisite churches outside of North America. Third, the definition of succession provided for this research requires the process to be intentional—that the transition of power and authority happens with a specific plan from one pastor to the next. Thus, multisite churches that have had to undergo emergency succession due to moral failure, removing the pastor from his position, a health crisis, etc. does not generalize well.

### **Conclusion**

This research design exists to explain how multisite churches in North America went through pastoral succession and project best practices for multisite churches that will go through pastoral succession in the future. In order to accomplish this, the design unfolded as a two-phase sequential mixed-methods study. Phase 1 surveyed all available multisite churches that had undergone pastoral succession at the time of the research—21 of 35 churches at the time of the survey. This survey was developed through interaction with an expert panel. Phase 2 utilized a three-round Delphi panel to uncover best practices for multisite pastoral succession. This process resulted in 76 practices.

Since the multisite church is still a new phenomenon, this research in no way ends the discussion on multisite pastoral succession. Rather, this research hopes to begin the conversation, form a solid base of research for future studies, provide churches to further interview, and aid multisite churches that desire to go through the pastoral succession process with as much wisdom as possible.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to aid multisite churches in better understanding and implementing pastoral succession. Since the movement is still only decades old, each succession story helps churches that will be going through their own succession in subsequent years. The study employed an exploratory two-phase sequential mixed-methods design, utilizing a survey in phase 1 and the Delphi method in phase 2. The research questions that guided this design were as follows:

1. How do multisite church leaders report their succession process from generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession?
2. How does multisite organizational structure influence pastoral succession strategy?
3. What aspects of the inherited multisite church remained after succession?
4. What lessons have multisite leaders who have completed the succession process learned?
5. What do experts in multisite pastoral succession believe are the best practices of a succession plan for multisite churches?

This chapter documents the compilation protocol for the study, sample and demographic information for each phase, an analysis of findings by research question, and an evaluation of the research design.

#### **Compilation Protocol**

In this exploratory two-phase design, a survey was created through expert panel participation for phase 1, followed by a Delphi panel in phase 2. Phase 1 began by developing a survey based upon the available succession literature and interaction with experts in the field. The survey was then shared with an expert in survey design at Louisiana State University, who did not give feedback on content about succession but on

how to structure questions to best analyze and understand survey responses. The result of that interaction was a forty-seven-item survey broken up into six parts. This survey was then sent electronically to fourteen experts to solicit feedback on questions,<sup>1</sup> content, and survey flow. Experts were asked to rate the items on a scale of 1-4 and offer feedback on each question. Nine experts responded with ratings, two experts sent written responses, one expert offered no specific feedback but agreed with the responses of a colleague (who was also an expert on the panel), and one expert offered no feedback. These interactions led to a revised survey of forty-six items. This survey was then developed in SurveyMonkey's software, instructions were added, and it was sent as a pilot to five individuals familiar with the multisite church.<sup>2</sup> After their feedback, the Multisite Pastoral Succession Survey reached its final form.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrent with this step was population discovery. Roughly 400 churches (both multisite and single-site), denominational leaders, and church consultants were contacted via email<sup>4</sup> and asked for information on multisite churches that have undergone succession or any other contacts they might have. In addition, I created a Twitter campaign to broaden the reach of the sampling request. These methods produced a list of 77 churches that might fit the population. Contacting those churches produced 35 confirmed multisite successions (several remained unconfirmed, and the rest did not fit the population). Of the 35 confirmed multisite successions, 21 churches completed the survey.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See invitation in appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup>Since the population for the study was small, I did not want to remove any potential churches from the pool of respondents by sending out a full pilot study. After expert panel interaction, these five individuals helped to work through the survey and offered feedback on wording, flow, areas of confusion, etc.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup>See appendix 3.

<sup>5</sup>See appendix 6 for the list of all 35 churches.

Phase 2 began after reviewing the results of the survey, evaluating open-ended responses, and running statistical analysis on metric data from the first 20 surveys in phase 1.<sup>6</sup> Three multisite church consultants with backgrounds in succession took an original list of thirteen open-ended questions and offered feedback. That feedback resulted in an adjusted survey of eleven questions.<sup>7</sup> Concurrent to the feedback, I confirmed participation from twelve panelists to join the Delphi.<sup>8</sup> Eleven of the 12 panelists completed round 1, and 10 panelists completed rounds 2 and 3. Through three rounds of feedback, panelists found consensus on 76 practices. What follows is a summary of those findings, followed by an evaluation of this project's methodology.

### **Summary of Findings**

Phase 1 discovered 35 churches that fit this study's qualifications for multisite senior pastor succession. Of those 35, 21 participated in the survey—providing a snapshot of their succession experience. Phase 2 invited 12 panelists into the study and all 12 agreed to participate. Eleven panelists finished round 1, 10 panelists finished round 2, and 10 panelists finished round 3. Each phase will be examined and reported, with specific attention given to the findings related to the research questions.

#### **Phase 1: Succession Survey**

Phase 1 of the study covered 21 churches and sought to address research questions 1 through 4. Parts 1 and 2 of the survey focused upon background information for the survey—both demographic information for the churches and respondents, as well as basic information about the structure of the church at the time of succession.

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<sup>6</sup>Time constraints required analysis of the available surveys at the time.

<sup>7</sup>See appendix 7.

<sup>8</sup>See appendix 8 for invitation.

**Church demographics and background.** Qualifying respondents in the survey had to serve at their church as a Gen 1 pastor, Gen 2 pastor, senior leadership team member, or governing board member. The categories of respondents are shown in table 7.

Table 7. Succession survey respondents

Answer Choices	Responses	
Gen 2 pastor (or one of the Gen 2 pastors)	52.38%	11
Senior leadership team member	33.33%	7
Gen 1 pastor	14.29%	3
Governing board member	0.00%	0
Total	100%	21

These 21 churches had an average (mean) age of 44 years and existed as single-site churches for an average of 35 years before becoming multisite. These churches also were multisite an average of six years before their succession and are, on average, less than three years removed from their succession. See table 8 for church age data.

These churches also came from varied denominational and network backgrounds. Questions 7 and 8 focused on both denomination and affiliation since some churches are in both environments and some are in one—thus giving a broader understanding of how these churches engage in larger works. See table 9 for denominational backgrounds.

Regarding network affiliations, 16 churches responded to the question; five of those 16 churches replied with “None” or “N/A.” The remaining 11 churches represent some type of network affiliation with a total of 15 different networks, associations, or affiliations—8 of the 11 having multiple affiliations. See table 10 for network affiliations.

Table 8. Church data

Founding Year	Current Age	Multisite Year	Age Going Multisite	Succession Year	Years Multisite Before Succession	Years Since Succession
1871	146	2002	131	2013	11	4
1954	63	2009	55	2013	4	4
1955	62	1995	40	2011	16	6
1957	60	2012	55	2016	4	1
1963	54	2004	41	2015	11	2
1966	51	2008	42	2017	9	0
1967	50	2014	47	2016	2	1
1967	50	2012	45	2012	0	5
1972	45	2007	35	2008	1	9
1973	44	2003	30	2011	8	6
1980	37	2014	34	2015	1	2
1981	36	2005	24	2011	6	6
1982	35	2010	28	2016	6	1
1987	30	2008	21	2015	7	2
1990	27	2005	15	2016	11	1
1991	26	2011	20	2013	2	4
1993	24	2010	17	2017	7	0
1994	23	2012	18	2016	4	1
1995	22	2006	11	2015	9	2
1996	21	2010	14	2014	4	3
1997	20	2012	15	2017	5	0
Average	44		35		6	2.86

Table 9. Denominational backgrounds

Denomination	Responses	
Non-Denominational	33.33%	7
Southern Baptist Convention	19.05%	4
Foursquare	9.52%	2
Lutheran	9.52%	2
Assemblies of God	4.76%	1
Conservative Baptist Northwest	4.76%	1
Converge Worldwide	4.76%	1
Reformed Church in America	4.76%	1
United Methodist Church	4.76%	1
Vineyard	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

Table 10. Network affiliations

Networks	Responses	
None	5	31.25%
Willow Creek Association	5	31.25%
Purpose Driven Network	3	18.75%
Association of Related Churches	2	12.50%
Acts 29	1	6.25%
Florida Baptist Convention	1	6.25%
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ	1	6.25%
Mosaix Network	1	6.25%
National Association of Evangelicals	1	6.25%
New Thing Network	1	6.25%
North Point Partner	1	6.25%
Orange	1	6.25%
Salt Network	1	6.25%
San Diego Church Planting Network	1	6.25%
Treasuring Christ Together Network	1	6.25%
Vineyard USA	1	6.25%
Missing = 5		

Questions 9-15 focused on basic information about the church before succession and leading up to the time of succession. Tables 11 and 12 show campus relationships. The majority of churches (66.67 percent) in the study had two or three campuses at succession, and most churches (71.43 percent) had campuses within a driving distance of thirty minutes or less.

Table 11. Number of campuses at succession, Q9: At the time of succession, how many geographic campuses did the church have?

Campuses	Responses	
Two	38.10%	8
Three	28.57%	6
Four	19.05%	4
Five	9.52%	2
Eight	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21



Table 12. Distance between campuses, Q10: At the time of succession, all geographic campuses were: (Check most applicable)

Answer Choices	Responses	
Located within a driving distance of 30 minutes or less of each other	71.43%	15
Located within a driving distance of 60 minutes or less of each other	23.81%	5
Located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but located throughout the same geographic region (Northwest, Southeast, etc.)	4.76%	1
Located within a driving distance of 90 minutes or less of each other	0.00%	0
Located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but throughout the same state	0.00%	0
Located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but throughout the same state and neighboring states	0.00%	0
Total	100%	21

Question 13 looked at sermon delivery at the time of succession and question 14 looked at the number of worship services. The churches had varied responses, with over half of the churches (11 in total) delivering sermons through live teaching at all campuses.<sup>9</sup> Further, the majority of churches had six or fewer worship services on a weekend. These questions were used to help understand the complexity that exists during succession.

Table 13. Sermon delivery at succession, Q13: The majority of sermon delivery at the time of succession was:

Answer Choices	Responses	
In-person teaching at all campuses of the same sermon idea/text by campus or teaching pastors	28.57%	6
In-person teaching at all campuses of varied idea/text by campus or teaching pastors	19.05%	4
Hybrid model of video at some campuses and live teaching at other campuses	19.05%	4
Other (please explain)	19.05%	4
Video (live stream or pre-recorded) of a pastor at one campus to all other campuses	14.29%	3
One pastor rotating to different locations on a Sunday to preach in person	0.00%	0
Total	100%	21

<sup>9</sup>Churches marked “other” either had (1) a combination of choices (two churches), (2) live teaching through a large teaching team (one church), or (3) a senior pastor who rotates campuses with video at the alternate campuses (one church).

Table 14. Worship services at succession, Q14: At time of succession, how many total weekend worship services did the church hold across all geographical locations?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Six	23.81%	5
Five	19.05%	4
Four	14.29%	3
Eight	14.29%	3
Seven	4.76%	1
Nine	4.76%	1
Ten	4.76%	1
Eleven	4.76%	1
Eighteen	4.76%	1
Twenty or More	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

When it came to direct church planting, only 4 churches had no participation in planting churches, with the remaining 17 churches participating in multiple ways. Notably, 11 of the churches (52.38 percent) engaged directly in planting.

Table 15. Involvement in church planting, Q15: Prior to succession, had the church planted autonomous churches in any of the following ways? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	
The church indirectly supported new churches through denominational or network giving	57.14%	12
The church directly sponsored church-planting by sending leaders and money to start new churches	52.38%	11
The church did not participate in church-planting	19.05%	4
The church “spun off” one or more of its campuses into autonomous churches, while still remaining multisite	9.52%	2
Other (please explain)	0.00%	0
Total	100%	21

Question 11 asked if the Gen 1 pastor was also the founding pastor of the church; it found that in 9 of 21 churches (42.86 percent) the Gen 1 pastor was also the founding pastor. These 21 churches also had pastoral tenures ranging from 11 years all the way to 35 years, with over half of the churches having tenures between 20 and 30 years.

Table 16. Gen 1 pastor tenure, Q12: How many years did the Gen 1 pastor serve as senior leader before completing succession to the Gen 2 pastor?

Years Serving	Responses	
20 years	14.29%	3
25 years	14.29%	3
11 years	9.52%	2
22 years	9.52%	2
26 years	9.52%	2
30 years	9.52%	2
12 years	4.76%	1
18 years	4.76%	1
27 years	4.76%	1
28 years	4.76%	1
29 years	4.76%	1
33 years	4.76%	1
35 years	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

The survey also asked for metric data from the churches for the three years leading up to succession, the year of succession, and the three years following succession. While not all churches had that data, 16 churches provided all or most of the data. The median size (average weekly attendance) for a church at the time of succession was 2,574. The median yearly baptisms at the time of succession was 131. The median general giving at the time of succession was \$5,635,854. Tables 17 through 19 show each church's data leading up to succession, along with change. These tables calculate change as the succession year minus the mean of the three prior years. Ten of the 16 churches had, even if minimal, positive change in attendance. Eight out of 14 churches had, even if minimal, positive change in baptisms. However, 14 out of 16 churches had positive change in general giving.

Table 17. Average weekly attendance leading to succession

	Succession Year (-3)	Succession Year (-2)	Succession Year (-1)	Succession Year	Change
Church 1	2,800	2,960	3,115	3,100	142
Church 2	4,286	4,473	4,529	4,212	-217
Church 3	1,200	1,252	1,321	1,340	82
Church 4	5,261	4,726	4,539	4,255	-587
Church 5	2,184	1,999	1,978	2,241	187
Church 6	1,326	1,372	1,597	1,629	197
Church 7	2,711	2,550	2,952	2,889	151
Church 8	950	965	941	932	-20
Church 9	1,623	1,631	1,567	1,622	15
Church 10	10,503	9,958	9,438	10,207	241
Church 11	--	4,716	4,837	5,513	737
Church 12	2,552	2,725	2,935	2,938	201
Church 13	1,881	1,918	1,758	1,717	-135
Church 14	7,869	8,390	7,503	7,412	-509
Church 15	2,447	2,451	2,181	2,259	-101
Church 16	1,248	1,232	1,365	1,331	49
Mean	3,256	3,332	3,285	3,350	59
Median	2,447	2,501	2,558	2,574	72

Note: The negative number after “Succession Year” indicates which year before succession the data originates. Thus, if the succession year was 2010, “Succession Year (-3)” would indicate data from 2007. Each column represents a calendar year leading up to the year of succession.

Table 18. Yearly baptisms leading to succession

	Succession Year (-3)	Succession Year (-2)	Succession Year (-1)	Succession Year	Change
Church 1	--	--	--	--	--
Church 2	105	114	109	123	14
Church 3	82	78	76	88	9
Church 4	313	334	207	213	-72
Church 5	92	126	120	120	7
Church 6	76	87	104	90	1
Church 7	48	60	69	124	65
Church 8	--	--	--	--	--
Church 9	95	92	82	86	-4
Church 10	--	780	607	1343	650
Church 11	227	213	341	407	147
Church 12	79	184	142	198	63
Church 13	209	150	79	138	-8
Church 14	760	1090	873	715	-193
Church 15	90	45	58	59	-5
Church 16	117	164	171	155	4
Mean	176	251	217	276	61
Median	95	138	115	131	15

Note: The negative number after “Succession Year” indicates which year before succession the data originates. Thus, if the succession year was 2010, “Succession Year (-3)” would indicate data from 2007. Each column represents a calendar year leading up to the year of succession.

Table 19. Yearly general giving leading to succession

	Succession Year (-3)	Succession Year (-2)	Succession Year (-1)	Succession Year	Change
Church 1	\$4,298,000	\$4,403,000	\$6,660,000	\$6,886,000	\$1,765,667
Church 2	\$9,968,000	\$10,442,000	\$10,416,000	\$10,112,000	-\$163,333
Church 3	\$2,400,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,600,000	\$2,700,000	\$200,000
Church 4	\$13,674,909	\$11,556,223	\$11,141,074	\$10,823,330	-\$1,300,739
Church 5	\$2,583,412	\$2,522,416	\$2,752,516	\$2,950,116	\$330,668
Church 6	\$2,113,548	\$2,385,985	\$2,461,838	\$3,494,456	\$1,173,999
Church 7	\$5,280,702	\$5,689,671	\$5,908,310	\$6,177,139	\$550,911
Church 8	\$2,986,733	\$3,215,472	\$3,172,246	\$3,247,933	\$123,116
Church 9	\$2,333,957	\$2,431,508	\$2,337,538	\$2,515,418	\$147,750
Church 10	\$16,951,904	\$17,646,796	\$16,922,208	\$17,603,926	\$430,290
Church 11	\$6,805,199	\$7,310,338	\$7,727,607	\$8,728,574	\$1,447,526
Church 12	\$4,259,445	\$4,638,444	\$4,850,320	\$5,094,569	\$511,833
Church 13	\$7,405,874	\$6,871,722	\$7,233,053	\$7,447,820	\$277,604
Church 14	\$8,172,061	\$9,926,055	\$10,632,468	\$9,781,280	\$204,419
Church 15	\$3,971,300	\$3,878,400	\$3,897,035	\$4,015,253	\$99,675
Church 16	\$1,700,000	\$2,100,000	\$2,300,000	\$2,400,000	\$366,667
Mean	\$5,931,565	\$6,094,877	\$6,313,263	\$6,498,613	\$385,378
Median	\$4,278,723	\$4,520,722	\$5,379,315	\$5,635,854	\$909,601
Note: The negative number after “Succession Year” indicates which year before succession the data originates. Thus, if the succession year was 2010, “Succession Year (-3)” would indicate data from 2007. Each column represents a calendar year leading up to the year of succession.					

The above tables show that most churches had positive numeric growth heading into succession. Positive financial growth occurred in 14 out of 16 churches. Growth in baptisms was the least noticeable area. See tables 33 through 35 for t-test analysis on churches that provided all post-succession data.

**Findings related to research question 1.** The first research question focused on what the churches had done during succession—“How do multisite church leaders report their succession process from generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession?” The bulk of the survey sought to answer that question using two sections: (1) succession process information (questions 16-30), and (2) post-succession information (questions 31-39).

Succession often begins with a conversation, which question 16 addresses. Sixteen churches (76.19 percent) stated that the Gen 1 pastor initiated the succession

conversation, 1 church (4.76 percent) said the church leadership initiated the conversation, 2 churches (9.52 percent) had to consider succession when their pastor was diagnosed with a disease, and 2 churches (9.52 percent) had a combination—one had the conversation between Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors and one church started the conversation with the Gen 1 pastor plus the board.

Table 20 shows the length of time from the original conversation about succession to the completion of succession. Nineteen churches had a process of a year or more, with 15 of those churches (71.43 percent) having a succession timeline of two years or longer.

Table 20. Length of succession plan, Q17: From start to finish, how long after initiating the topic of the Gen 1 pastor’s succession did the succession process take?

Answer Choices	Responses	
24-48 months	38.10%	8
More than 48 months	33.33%	7
12-24 months	19.05%	4
0-6 months	4.76%	1
6-12 months	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

Table 21 reflects motivations for succession and reveals varied reasons why the church chose to enter into succession. Age was the largest factor (66.67 percent), followed by handing off leadership of the church at a time of positive growth.

Table 22 shows the groups of people who worked on the succession plan. Including those who selected “other,” the responses largely showed a collaborative effort on behalf of the Gen 1/Gen 2 pastor(s) and governing authorities in the church. In only 5 churches was the plan developed entirely by one group or one person. Further, in 5 cases (23.81 percent), the churches used the services of a consulting firm to help develop their plan (question 20).

Table 21. Motivations for succession, Q18: What were the contributing factors to initiating the succession conversation? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	
Age of the Gen 1 pastor required consideration of the next senior leader	66.67%	14
Gen 1 pastor desired to transition leadership while the church was in a period of positive growth	57.14%	12
Health of the Gen 1 pastor required consideration of the next senior leader	19.05%	4
Gen 1 pastor wanted to pursue different ministry outside the church	14.29%	3
Other (please explain) <sup>10</sup>	14.29%	3
Governing board desired to pursue a new direction for the church	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

Table 22. Succession plan involvement, Q19: Once the church committed to implement pastoral succession, which people or groups were involved in developing the succession plan? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	
The pastor and governing board worked together to develop the plan	47.62%	10
Other (please explain)	38.10%	8
The Gen 1 pastor developed the plan and presented it to the governing board for feedback and modification	19.05%	4
Denominational or network leaders developed the plan	14.29%	3
The governing board developed the plan and presented it to the Gen 1 pastor for feedback and modification	9.52%	2
The Gen 1 pastor developed the plan entirely	4.76%	1
The governing board developed the plan entirely	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

How a church communicates the succession plan is important. This survey found that, including those that selected “other,” 10 churches communicated with their staff first (either the staff as a whole or the leadership team on staff), 5 communicated to lay leaders first, 3 told the entire congregation first, 1 told the board, 1 told denominational leadership, and 1 was unsure. Further, when the plan was communicated to the congregation, it was communicated by the Gen 1 pastor in 13 instances (61.9 percent).

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<sup>10</sup>Of the three selecting “other,” all of the churches referenced a desire to hand off leadership in different ways to a new generation. One spoke of the Gen 1 pastor’s stage of life and need to put the church “in a positive position;” one church did not want to lose “the very gifted Gen 2 pastor;” and one Gen 1 pastor “believed younger leadership [was] needed for God’s best for [the] young congregation.”

Table 23. First communication of succession, Q21: To whom did the church leadership first communicate the succession plan once it was developed?

Answer Choices	Responses	
The church staff	38.10%	8
Lay leaders in the congregation	23.81%	5
Other (please explain)	23.81%	5
The entire congregation	14.29%	3
Total	100%	21

Table 24. Person who communicated succession to the congregation, Q22: At the time the succession plan was communicated to the congregation, who communicated it?

Answer Choices	Responses	
The Gen 1 pastor	61.90%	13
Both the Gen 1 pastor and a member or members of the governing board	14.29%	3
Other (please explain)	14.29%	3
A member or members of the governing board	9.52%	2
Total	100%	21

Questions 23-30 focused on the Gen 2 pastor’s relationship to the church and interaction with the Gen 1 pastor before succession. Table 25 reveals how these churches searched for the Gen 2 pastor(s). In nine instances (42.86 percent), the church already knew who the Gen 2 pastor would be. The other options show various ways a church pursued finding the Gen 2 pastor.

Table 25. How the church sought a Gen 2 pastor, Q23: How did the church search for a Gen 2 pastor (or pastors)? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	
The church already knew who the Gen 2 pastor would be when it developed the plan	42.86%	9
Other (please explain) <sup>11</sup>	28.57%	6
The church implemented a broad external search for a new pastoral candidate	19.05%	4
The church only searched for qualified pastors from within the church staff	19.05%	4
The church already had a list of viable candidates it wanted to pursue	9.52%	2
The church contracted with a search group to conduct a search	9.52%	2
Total	100%	21

<sup>11</sup>The six churches that selected “other” demonstrated the weakness in this question. Each search was a bit different. However, of the six churches that selected “other,” five formed some type of list of candidates (either from the church or from other churches), and one was placed via denominational appointment.



Question 26 highlighted the previous role of the Gen 2 pastor(s). Most respondents selected “other,” and thus table 26 lists the various roles the Gen 2 pastor(s) served in prior to succession. In two cases, the Gen 1 pastor handed leadership to a team of pastors. Thus, the total number represents all previous roles. The two most common roles to assume Gen 2 leadership are campus pastor followed by executive pastor.

Table 26. Previous role of Gen 2 pastor

Roles	Responses
Campus Pastor	6
Executive Pastor	5
Staff Pastor	2
Teaching Pastor	2
Previous Pastor at Another Church	1
Executive Teaching Pastor	1
Teaching and College Pastor	1
Traveling Evangelist	1
Chaplain	1
Preaching Pastor	1
Student Ministry Leader	1
Spiritual Formation Leader	1
Various Roles	1
Seminary Professor	1
Total	25

When it comes to internal succession, the Gen 1 pastor mentoring Gen 2 leadership becomes an important aspect of the succession process. In 18 instances, the Gen 1 pastor served on the same staff “for a season of mentoring before completing the succession process” (question 27). The duration of those 18 instances are shown in table 27, which shows fairly even distribution of durations, with one-third of respondents having a mentoring process that was two years or longer.

Table 27. Duration of Gen 1 mentoring, Q28: If yes, how long from the identification of the Gen 2 pastor(s) to the completion of the succession process did the Gen 1 pastor mentor the Gen 2 pastor(s)?

Answer Choices	Responses	
6-12 months	27.78%	5
0-6 months	22.22%	4
36 or more months	22.22%	4
12-24 months	16.67%	3
24-36 months	11.11%	2
Total	100%	18

When rounded to the nearest whole year, the Gen 1 pastor handed leadership off to the Gen 2 pastor(s) at an average age of 63, with the Gen 2 pastor(s) at an average age of 42<sup>12</sup>—putting a 21-year age difference between the leaders. The largest age difference was 30 years (one instance) and the smallest distance was 0 years.<sup>13</sup> Table 28 shows, in ascending order by age of the Gen 1 pastor, the age differences for each succession.<sup>14</sup>

Questions 24 and 25 asked for information on whether the Gen 2 was internal or external and whether there was a familial relationship between the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastor(s). However, through the sampling phase, I found this data on all 35 churches.<sup>15</sup> Thus, appendix 6 lists all instances, and they are summarized in table 29. From examining the succession events,<sup>16</sup> 28 churches (80 percent) had some form of internal

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<sup>12</sup>If the Gen 1 pastor handed off to a leadership team, the average (mean) age of those leaders was considered.

<sup>13</sup>This church’s succession was part of a phased process. The eventual goal was to go through a second succession to a pastor who is currently in his mid-30s. Further, shortly after this church went through succession, it launched its second campus as an autonomous church. The Gen 1, Gen 2, and Gen 3 pastor are all still part of the church. This process completed in January 2018.

<sup>14</sup>It should be noted that in each instance of the 21 surveys, the Gen 2 pastor was still the senior leader of the church (question 32) at the time of survey implementation.

<sup>15</sup>Data came through internet research and, at times, email contact seeking to confirm succession stories.

<sup>16</sup>The terminology in table 29 is expanded from the original definitions in order to understand the varied succession types better. An internal succession is where the Gen 2 pastor comes from the same

succession. Further, seven of the 35 churches (20 percent) had some type of familial relationship to the Gen 1 pastor. Along with that, three of the 35 churches (8.57 percent) moved into a team leadership model where the Gen 1 pastor handed off responsibilities to a team of two or three co-pastors.

Table 28. Gen 1 and Gen 2 age distribution

Gen 1 Age at Succession (Years)	Gen 2 Age at Succession (Years)	Age Difference (Years)
52	52	0
52	42	10
57	35	22
58	40	18
59	33	26
62	42	20
63	35	28
63	43	20
63	42	21
63	47	16
64	50	14
64	35	29
65	36	29
66	45	21
66	40	26
66	48	18
67	38	29
67	48 (45, 45, 55)	19
67	37	30
68	39 (41, 37, 39)	29
--	52	--
Average: 63	42	21

church as the Gen 1 pastor. A subset of that type is “Internal—Familial,” where the pastor has some sort of familial relationship to the Gen 1 pastor (usually father/son). Another subset is “Internal—Appointed,” where denominational leadership places the to-be Gen 2 pastor at the church for a season of mentoring and learning *before* becoming the Gen 2 pastor or appoints a pastor who was currently on staff. An external hire comes from outside the Gen 1 pastor’s church, and “External—Appointed” is a subset of that type, where denominational leadership places the Gen 2 pastor at the church.

Table 29. Succession types

Succession Type	Responses	
Internal <sup>17</sup>	45.71%	16
Internal—Familial	20.00%	7
Internal—Team	8.57%	3
Internal—Appointed	5.71%	2
External	11.43%	4
External—Appointed	8.57%	3
Total	100%	35
Note: This table includes all churches from appendix 6. Of the 21 churches surveyed, eighteen (85.71 percent) had an internal succession.		

Part 4 of the survey (questions 31-39) asked post-succession questions. A number of those were asked for other research questions. However, questions 37-39 looked at some of the ways the Gen 1 pastor interacts on the staff (if at all) post-succession, as well as compensation given to the Gen 1 pastor upon retirement. Questions 37-39 are included in RQ1 because Gen 1 pastor involvement post-succession is an aspect of succession that effective succession plans often consider. Table 30 shows the ways in which the Gen 1 pastor has been involved since succession. Including churches that selected “other,” in 11 instances the Gen 1 pastor remained at the church immediately after succession, in 4 instances the Gen 1 pastor returned after being gone for a period of time, in 4 instances the Gen 1 pastor left the church, in 1 instance the Gen 1 pastor had oversight of the church through the denomination, and in 1 instance the Gen 1 pastor had passed away. Of note in these findings is how often the Gen 1 pastor stayed at the church after succession or returned to the church after taking some time away.

Fourteen churches answered question 38, which asked how the Gen 1 pastor stayed involved (in a paid or unpaid capacity). Table 31 shows that, in instances where the Gen 1 pastor was still at the church, pastoral involvement was high—largely through preaching and, at times, through mentoring.

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<sup>17</sup>One church selected a Gen 2 pastor who was faculty at the church-based seminary. For this study, that succession is still considered internal.

Table 30. Gen 1 involvement post-succession, Q37: How has the Gen 1 pastor participated in the church since the succession?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Other (please explain)	33.33%	7
Has remained at church on paid staff	19.05%	4
Has remained at church as a congregant (unpaid)	19.05%	4
Has not attended the church regularly since succession	14.29%	3
Left for a period of time but has returned as a congregant (unpaid)	9.52%	2
Left for a period of time but has returned on paid staff	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21
Note: Of those that selected “other,” three referenced serving in some type of advisory or mentoring role, and one mentioned “intentional ‘non-involvement’ in church leadership.”		

Table 31. Gen 1 role at the church post-succession, Q38: If the Gen 1 pastor is currently at the church (paid or unpaid), do any of the following apply?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Gen 1 pastor preaches occasionally in worship services	85.71%	12
Other examples different from above (please explain)	28.57%	4
Gen 1 pastor participates in staff meetings	21.43%	3
Gen 1 pastor leads in a ministry area as paid staff	14.29%	2
Gen 1 pastor leads in a ministry area as unpaid congregant	7.14%	1
Missing = 7		

Question 39 was an open-ended question that allowed some explanation of compensation for the Gen 1 pastor. Sixteen churches shared this information and, after reading through the responses, responses were broken down into eight categories—with many responses able to be categorized in multiple areas. Six churches gave some type of retirement contribution, and eight churches continued to pay the Gen 1 pastor at full or partial salary for a set period of time (often multiple years after succession).

Table 32. Gen 1 compensation arrangements, Q39: Please briefly explain any type of compensation arrangement given to the Gen 1 pastor or Gen 1 pastor’s family upon succession

	Still on Staff	Retirement Contribution	Terminating Salary Arrangement	Ongoing Salary Arrangement	Housing Allowance	Health Insurance	Member Gifts	Misc.
1		X	X			X		
2					X	X		
3	X							
4			X					
5							X	
6		X	X					
7		X						
8				X				
9		X	X					
10			X			X		
11			X					
12			X					X
13		X						
14							X	
15			X					
16		X						
T	1	6	8	1	1	3	2	1

Finally, as part of the reporting of pastoral succession, questions 40-43 looked at pre- and post-succession metrics. Starting from the year of succession, the survey requested data on giving, baptism, and average weekly attendance for each church—the three years leading up to succession, the year of succession, and the three years following succession. Eight churches provided all or most of all seven years of data.

The pre- and post-succession data of these eight churches was compared using a two-sample, unpaired, two-tailed student’s t-test<sup>18</sup> to determine any significance in difference to the metrics before and after succession.<sup>19</sup> With a confidence level of 95 percent, significance existed in 5 out of 8 churches for attendance, 3 out of 6 churches for baptisms, and 4 out of 8 churches for general giving. Tables 33-35 shows each church’s

<sup>18</sup>For guidance on when to use t-tests to compare means, see Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 201.

<sup>19</sup>For this analysis, the “Succession Year” was removed and the data was compared before and after succession.

data. This data preliminarily suggests that attendance (and the change related to it after succession) does not have the same type of influence across all metrics (in other words, attendance going up or down does not mean that baptisms or giving will go up or down accordingly). Further, all noticed changes in yearly general giving were positive (churches increased in finances after succession). Only a single church’s metrics (church 7) showed positive significance for each area measured.

Table 33. T-test analysis on attendance

	Before (Mean)	Before (SD)	After (Mean)	After (SD)	Difference	T-Value	P-Value	Significance
Church 1	2,958	158.00	4,015	378.00	1,057	4.47	0.011	Positive
Church 2	4,429	127.00	3,749	194.00	-680	-5.08	0.007	Negative
Church 3	1,258	60.70	1,376	48.50	118	2.64	0.058	None
Church 4	4,842	375.00	3,920	213.00	-922	-3.70	0.021	Negative
Church 5	2,054	113.00	2,701	144.00	647	6.12	0.004	Positive
Church 6	1,432	145.00	1,504	29.60	72	0.85	0.445	None
Church 7	2,738	202.00	3,200	205.00	463	2.78	0.050	Positive
Church 8	952	12.10	929	54.60	-23	-0.71	0.515	None

Note: This t-test analysis compares the mean of the three numbers provided before succession with the mean three numbers provided after succession. Standard deviation (SD) represents the distribution of each group. The t-value describes the ratio of the signal (average difference in mean between the two groups) and noise (standard error between the two groups). The p-value provides the probability that the difference in means in the before and after data happened by random chance. The lower the p-value, the less likely the data happened by random chance. For this study, a 95 percent confidence level means that p-values of .05 and below were considered significant. The final column in these tables—significance—shows any church that met the 95% threshold either positively (“after” metrics were higher) or negatively (“after” metrics were lower).

Table 34. T-test analysis on baptisms

	Before (Mean)	Before (SD)	After (Mean)	After (SD)	Difference	T-Value	P-Value	Significance
Church 1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	NA
Church 2	109	4.51	72	20.80	-37	-3.01	0.040	Negative
Church 3	79	3.06	86	9.02	7	1.27	0.272	None
Church 4	285	68.10	153	32.50	-132	-3.03	0.034	Negative
Church 5	113	18.15	102	30.83	-10	-0.50	0.643	None
Church 6	89	14.10	111	8.39	22	2.36	0.078	None
Church 7	59	10.50	123	35.23	64	3.00	0.040	Positive
Church 8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	NA

Table 35. T-test analysis on general giving

	Before (Mean)	Before (SD)	After (Mean)	After (SD)	Difference	T- Value	P- Value	Signifi- cance
Church 1	\$5,120,333	\$1,334,424	\$7,519,333	\$339,229	\$2,399,000	3.02	0.039	Positive
Church 2	\$10,275,333	\$266,476	\$10,752,333	\$902,101	\$477,000	0.88	0.429	None
Church 3	\$2,500,000	\$100,000	\$2,900,000	\$200,000	\$400,000	3.10	0.036	Positive
Church 4	\$12,124,069	\$1,359,013	\$10,252,949	\$605,414	-\$1,871,120	-2.18	0.095	None
Church 5	\$2,619,448	\$119,208	\$3,415,551	\$354,040	\$796,103	3.69	0.021	Positive
Church 6	\$2,320,457	\$183,158	\$2,321,731	\$12,190	\$1,274	0.01	0.991	None
Church 7	\$5,626,228	\$318,578	\$6,861,987	\$317,997	\$1,235,759	4.75	0.009	Positive
Church 8	\$3,124,817	\$121,522	\$3,267,161	\$43,499	\$142,344	1.91	0.129	None

**Findings related to research question 2.** Question 2 asks, “How does multisite organizational structure influence pastoral succession strategy?” While organizational structures change over time, the goal of this question was to see if there were any changes in how a church goes through succession when looking at sermon delivery method, proximity of campuses, or size.<sup>20</sup> Since only 21 churches contributed to the study, discovering true influences can be difficult—making any findings preliminary. The most effective approach was to look at sermon delivery and church size to begin looking for differences in succession strategy.

Leadership Network’s research on multisite churches showed that the larger a church was, and the more campuses it had, the more likely it would be to utilize video teaching.<sup>21</sup> Regarding sermon delivery (question 13), four churches were video-based at the time of succession; 11 had live teaching; and the remaining 6 were a hybrid of live

<sup>20</sup>For the initial categories that helped inform how to approach RQ2, see Brian Nathaniel Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 179.

<sup>21</sup>Warren Bird, “Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard: Faster Growth, More New Believers and Greater Lay Participation,” Leadership Network, 2014, accessed October 6, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014\\_LN\\_Generis\\_Multisite\\_Church\\_Scorecard\\_Report\\_v2.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014_LN_Generis_Multisite_Church_Scorecard_Report_v2.pdf), 18. In Leadership Network’s study, churches were asked, “Which approach summarizes your overall approach across all your campuses?” Churches with 3-5 campuses were predominantly video-based or a hybrid model. However, churches that had 6 or more campuses were predominantly video-based.



and video teaching.<sup>22</sup> Though only 4 churches were video-based in this research, the findings were similar in regard to size—churches that were video-based had the largest average weekly attendance, followed by churches with a hybrid model, and then churches with in-person teaching.

Table 36. Church size at succession year based on sermon delivery

Sermon Delivery Type	Mean Attendance	N
In-person teaching	2,025	10
Hybrid teaching model	3,988	6
Video-based teaching	5,007	4
Total	3,767	20 <sup>23</sup>

An assumption might be that, since video venues are larger in attendance, they are also more geographically spread throughout a region. This study, however, does not strengthen that assumption. Three of the four video-based teaching churches had campuses within 30 minutes or less of each other, with the fourth church having campuses within 60 minutes or less of each other—as seen in table 37.

While sermon delivery did not evidence greater geographic distribution of campuses, one notable aspect of the succession strategy was in the use of consulting services (question 20). Churches that used consulting services were larger than the churches in table 36—having a median average weekly attendance of 5,513 at the year of

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<sup>22</sup>These numbers account for churches that selected “other” in their responses. When compared to table 13, the following adjustments have been made: (1) any in-person teaching has been combined (one church selecting “other” for question 13 had all in-person teaching), (2) any video teaching has been combined (one church selecting “other” for question 13 had a Saturday night service that was played at campuses while the senior pastor rotated on Sunday morning, and (3) the remaining hybrid answers were combined with the final two “other” responses (which stated some combination of elements).

<sup>23</sup>One church that reported live teaching did not report any metrics and is thus removed from this table. The average of the hybrid-model churches came by supplying one number as 2,587 for a church that did not list “Succession Year.” To get to this number, the mean percent decrease from “Succession Year -3” to “Succession Year -2” (5.87 percent) and “Succession Year -2” to “Succession Year -1” (5.47 percent) was applied to “Succession Year -1” and then input as “Succession Year.”

succession.<sup>24</sup> While only 5 churches employed consulting services (23.81 percent), all 5 were either video-based (3 churches) or a hybrid of live and video-based teaching (2 churches).<sup>25</sup> This study further found that churches that used consulting services had a higher percentage of external hires when compared to churches that did not. Further, while using consulting services did not noticeably shorten the succession timeline,<sup>26</sup> churches using consulting services did have a shorter Gen 1 to Gen 2 mentoring timeline (see tables 38 and 39).

Table 37. Video venue and geographic proximity

Campus Distance	In-Person Teaching		Video-Based Teaching		Hybrid Teaching Model		Totals	
	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Count	Percentage
Campuses located within a driving distance of 30 minutes or less of each other	42.86%	9	14.29%	3	14.29%	3	15	71.44%
Campuses located within a driving distance of 60 minutes or less of each other	9.52%	2	4.76%	1	9.52%	2	5	23.80%
Campuses located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but located throughout the same geographic region	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	4.76%	1	1	4.76%
Totals	52.38%	11	19.05%	4	28.57%	6		--

<sup>24</sup>This median comes from the following numbers: 10,207, 2,889, 5,513, 2,587, and 7,412. The number 2,587 is from the same church as n.23. Median was used because the larger church of the range would bring the mean up significantly and inflate the finding.

<sup>25</sup>Those two answers to question 13 were “other.” One church noted, “Every combination listed above.” The second noted, “Some live teaching streamed to all campuses, some in-person teaching at all campuses same topic, some in-person teaching at all campus [*sic*] separate topics.”

<sup>26</sup>Question 17 asks, “From start to finish, how long after initiating the topic of the Gen 1 pastor’s succession did the succession process take?” Of the five churches that used consulting services, one church took 12-24 months, three churches took 24-48 months, and one church took more than 48 months. For both populations, churches normally took 24 or more months to go through succession.

Table 38. Internal and external hires with consulting services,  
Q13: The Gen 2 pastor was/Gen 2 pastors were:

Answer Choices	No Consulting Services		Consulting Services	
An internal hire, found from inside the church staff	87.50%	14	60.00%	3
An external hire, found from outside the church staff	6.25%	1	40.00%	2
Other (please explain)	6.25%	1 <sup>27</sup>	0.00%	0
Total	100%	16	100%	5

Table 39. Gen 1 Mentoring of Gen 2 pastor(s)

Mentoring Duration	No Consulting Services		Consulting Services	
0-6 months	14.29%	2	50.00%	2
6-12 months	28.57%	4	25.00%	1
36 or more months	21.43%	3	25.00%	1
12-24 months	21.43%	3	0.00%	0
24-36 months	14.29%	2	0.00%	0
Total <sup>28</sup>	100%	14	100%	4

With this data in mind, a preliminary finding is that preaching methodology and church size might increase the need for outside help when developing a succession plan. Five of the 21 churches used consulting services, all 5 employed video in their preaching methodology (in some capacity), and they had a median attendance of 5,513. Further, the use of consulting might create a greater likelihood of an external hire and, thus, a reduced mentoring timeline for the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors.

**Findings related to research question 3.** Research question 3 sought what type of changes happen after succession—“What aspects of the inherited multisite church remained after succession?” At the time of the survey, the Gen 2 pastor was still the primary leader (or primary leaders, in the case of a team of Gen 2 pastors) of the church.

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<sup>27</sup>This church’s Gen 2 pastor was from a church-based seminary. In table 29, this result is considered an internal hire.

<sup>28</sup>Eighteen of the 21 churches reported a season of mentoring.

Questions 33-36 asked questions about staff and organizational changes, campus changes, church planting, and preaching changes.

Question 33 asked if certain changes took place after succession regarding structure—mission or vision statements, leadership structures, etc. Of the 17 churches that answered the question, each one had gone through organizational changes—from changes in mission and vision statements all the way to a reduction in force of its staff. Many churches go through these changes over their life cycle, but in these instances, Gen 2 leadership was able to make noticeable adjustments to church structures and systems.

Table 40. Organizational changes after succession, Q33: Since the original succession, have any of the following occurred? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	
The church has made significant changes to its leadership structure	76.47%	13
The church has changed its mission or vision statement	64.71%	11
The church has had other significant organizational changes (please explain)	47.06%	8
The church has changed its sermon delivery method	29.41%	5
The church has changed its governing structure	11.76%	2
The church has changed its name	0.00%	0
Missing = 4		

Sermon delivery method was followed up on in question 36. When comparing question 13 with question 36, one finds only slight adjustment in sermon delivery before and after succession. However, Gen 2 pastors (and their leadership) do have some ability to adjust sermon delivery (see table 41).

While many of the changes (except for sermon delivery) could also apply to single-site churches, question 34 focused on a specific aspect of multisite—asking what has happened to the church’s campuses since succession. While 11 churches (52.38 percent) have the same number of campuses as before, there were other noticeable changes in campuses among the other churches. Nine churches (42.86 percent) added

campuses; 2 churches (9.52 percent) closed down campuses, and 3 churches (14.29 percent) spun off campuses into autonomous churches (see table 42).

Table 41. Sermon delivery pre- and post-succession

Answer Choices	Responses Pre-		Responses Post-	
In-person teaching at all campuses of the same sermon idea/text by campus or teaching pastors	28.57%	6	38.10%	8
Hybrid model of video at some campuses and live teaching at other campuses	19.05%	4	19.05%	4
In-person teaching at all campuses of varied idea/text by campus or teaching pastors	19.05%	4	14.29%	3
Other (please explain)	19.05%	4	14.29%	3
Video (live stream or pre-recorded) of a pastor at one campus to all other campuses	14.29%	3	9.52%	2
One pastor rotating to different locations on a Sunday to preach in person	0.00%	0	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21	100%	21

Table 42. Campus changes since succession, Q34: Since the original succession, what has happened to your campuses? (Check all that apply)

Answer Choices	Responses	
We have the same number of campuses as before	52.38%	11
We have added campuses	42.86%	9
We have spun off campuses into autonomous churches	14.29%	3
We have closed down campuses	9.52%	2

Further, 5 out of the 21 churches have planted autonomous churches since succession. This data comes from question 35: “Since the original succession, has the church planted autonomous churches that were not previously campuses of the church?” However, when cross-tabulating that answer with question 15 (how churches were involved in church-planting *prior* to succession), one finds that the churches directly engaged in church planting before succession stayed engaged in church planting after succession. Thus, Gen 2 leadership engagement in church planting likely continues what existed prior to succession rather than starting a new endeavor into church planting. Table 43 shows the cross-tabulated answers to questions 15 and 35.

Table 43. Cross-tabulated church planting responses—Q15 and Q35

Question 15 (Pre-Succession) Answer Choices	Churches Answering “No” to Q35		Churches Answering “Yes” to Q35	
	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count
The church directly sponsored church-planting by sending leaders and money to start new churches	37.50%	6	100.00%	5
The church indirectly supported new churches through denominational or network giving	56.25%	9	60.00%	3
The church “spun off” one or more of its campuses into autonomous churches, while still remaining multisite	6.25%	1	20.00%	1
The church did not participate in church-planting	25.00%	4	0.00%	0
Other (please explain)	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Total	100%	16	100%	5

Since most churches in this study are only a few years removed from their succession, knowing which aspects of the structure remain and which aspects might change is difficult. The churches in this study reported: (1) Gen 2 leadership made organizational changes post-succession, (2) Gen 2 leadership changed the number of campuses in 10 out of 21 churches, and (3) churches that engaged in church planting after succession were also engaged in church planting prior to succession.

**Findings related to research question 4.** To help prepare for phase 2 (which answers research question 5), research question 4 asks, “What lessons have multisite leaders who have completed the succession process learned?” Questions 44-46 addressed this research question through providing churches with (1) an opportunity to rate their own opinion of their succession experience and (2) offering two open-ended questions that allowed the churches to address things they thought they did well and/or poorly.

Question 44 asked the survey respondents, “Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the succession process on a scale of 1-10 (1 being highly ineffective, 10 being highly effective)?” All 21 churches answered this question and gave a weighted average of 8.33. Table 44 shows a distribution of those results. Fifteen of the 21 churches rated their succession as an 8 or higher. While these results focus on one person’s opinion of the succession process, it reveals that the majority of churches felt that their process was very effective.

Table 44. Evaluation of succession process, Q44: Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the succession process on a scale of 1-10 (1 being highly ineffective, 10 being highly effective)?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Nine	38.10%	8
Ten	23.81%	5
Seven	19.05%	4
Eight	9.52%	2
Three	4.76%	1
Six	4.76%	1
Total	100%	21

Questions 45 and 46 asked what aspects of the succession the church would keep and which aspects they would change, respectively. Since most churches viewed their succession positively, it is no surprise that many aspects would be kept. Several themes emerge from these statements: (1) churches that utilized a team approach to succession found it valuable to the success of the succession; (2) churches found that their timeline (often multiple years long) was helpful; (3) churches saw that a strong relationship between the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastor aided in the succession; (4) churches that handled financial considerations with the Gen 1 pastors were grateful they did; (5) churches that celebrated the handoff of the pastors felt that it helped the entire process; and (6) churches that had and utilized a communication plan found it helpful. Table 45 details those responses, with any identifying information removed and minor edits to the comments for grammatical clarity.

Question 46 sought to find aspects of the succession the church might change if given the opportunity. Themes in these responses were as follows: (1) some churches felt that their timeline was too long; (2) some churches needed to better clarify how the Gen 1 pastor would interact post-succession; (3) some churches felt as if their communication plan needed to be strengthened; (4) some churches needed to have a more detailed search process; and (5) some churches needed to better handle staffing issues that the succession brought about.

The responses given in tables 45 and 46 helped provide details that the survey might not have been able to fully grasp. The answers showed many positive aspects to

succession as well as some mistakes from which to learn. These responses directly fed into phase 2 of the research, which addressed best practices of multisite succession.

Table 45. Elements of succession churches would keep, Q45: Now that the original succession process is complete, what elements of your church's succession process would you keep?

Response 1	Relationship and knowledge of the church and pastor is essential for both the succeeding pastor and the congregation.
Response 2	The [regular] meetings with people in the church (8-10 at a time) to explain the transition were good; the timeline in the last year was good; intentionality on Sunday morning services went well; prepared well financially; moving Gen 1 pastor's office . . . and letting [Gen 2 pastor] lead was a great idea.
Response 3	Everything, it went smoothly and successfully.
Response 4	Having a subset of Elder's Council (governing body) serve as a transition team. Utilizing a consultant from within the congregation to assist with building the succession process.
Response 5	The Sovereignty of God part. He worked through some crazy pre-succession ideas to end up putting us in a good place with the right leader. [The Gen 2 pastor] made tough decisions and pulled a good team around him.
Response 6	All of it.
Response 7	Intentionality. Year 1: Re-focus on vision and mission; Year 2: Pastor search; Year 3: Celebrate new pastor and ministry of retiring pastor.
Response 8	Long-range planning. Internal successor. Gen 1 pastor still 'around' as mentor and ministry contributor at direction of Gen 2 pastor.
Response 9	Time invested in leading with the Gen 1 pastor. Deep relationship developed before the transfer of authority.
Response 10	The respect, humility and grace between the Gen 1 and Gen 2 was amazing. We insured the financial stability of the Gen 1 Pastor through open dialogue and clear agreement prior to the succession. We did a great job of celebrating the ministry of the Gen 1 Pastor and also the passing of leadership to Gen 2 Pastor with congregational and community celebrations.
Response 11	Diverse selection team, utilizing a chemistry team, utilizing a search firm, not compromising, communication plan
Response 12	Mentoring between Gen1 to Gen2 pastor; clear timeline, expectations, and communication between Gen 1 and Gen 2 as well as to staff, leaders, and congregants.
Response 13	We would keep the length of the process which for us was 5 years total. We would keep the Gen 1 leader strongly involved. We would keep the Gen 1 leader as a mentor of new leaders as they desire.
Response 14	HA. What a question. I am not sure I can answer that clearly yet. We still feel in the midst of it. I feel like our team rallied to help make this happen, because at times it felt like whiplash. I think our focus on three key things during the transition has been helpful. Book: Managing Transitions by Bridges was helpful. [Our consultant] was really helpful.
Response 15	100%, there really weren't any elements. I worked a long time along side [sic] previous pastor, that helped.
Response 16	There was great communication with the congregation and a plan was in place.
Response 17	Elder board ran the process and was very engaged. There was a priority to continue the momentum of ministry taking place and therefore to seriously look at existing staff. The board was open to new structures. The church members voted to affirm the elders recommendation.
Response 18	"Internal" search worked very well (pursued candidates we were already familiar with, within our broad network which primarily included our staff and our seminary).
Response 19	Would have still transitioned as it was time for us and the church.
Response 20	All of it.



Table 46. Elements of succession churches would change, Q46: Now that the original succession process is complete, what elements of your church’s succession process would you do differently, if any?

Response 1	[Comment made about confusion in roles on staff.]
Response 2	[We] would have had a shorter timeframe. . . . [We would have] defined roles more clearly. [We would have provided a] longer sabbatical for [Gen 1 pastor] before returning. [We would have done a better job making staffing decisions prior to succession.]
Response 3	Nothing that I can think of.
Response 4	Would consider [clarifying how the Gen 1 pastor would stay involved post-succession.]
Response 5	We would have a full succession process in place prior to any need for a succession plan.
Response 6	None.
Response 7	Not sure.
Response 8	More verbal, public support from Gen 1 pastor of Gen 2 pastor.
Response 9	Clarify roles between Gen 1 and Gen 2 staffers. Quicker transition time (less in the limbo between being identified as the next-gen leader and becoming organizational leader).
Response 10	It went so well and seamlessly that I don't know in our context what we could have done differently.
Response 11	Timeline was a little too long, made too many comparisons between candidates and existing senior pastor.
Response 12	None.
Response 13	We would keep the staff more informed during the process. . . .
Response 14	I have three or four [examples] of some departing staff I would love to do over again. On a personal note—I wish I was more prepared.
Response 15	We looked at both internal and external candidates at the same time which was a bit awkward.
Response 16	The length of time of the overlap between Gen 1 pastor and Gen 2 pastor after the membership vote . . . . felt a little long. . . .
Response 17	Resolve previously unresolved staff relational issues before succession occurred.
Response 18	[Gen 1 pastor] should have remained on staff for at least 6 months, working through things with the [Gen 2 pastor], assuring health and also making the difficult decisions. Also, [we] would [look to have a more] comprehensive selection process.

## Phase 2: Delphi Panel on Best Practices

Phase 2 of the research sought to answer research question 5, “What do experts in multisite pastoral succession believe are the best practices of a succession plan for multisite churches?” After analysis on 20 of the 21 surveys—specifically the open-ended responses—11 questions were created and sent to 12 experts, with 11 panelists answering the first round, and 10 of those experts answering the second and third rounds. Expertise

for panelists required (1) direct experience from inside a multisite church that has gone through succession or (2) experience as a consultant who has helped multisite churches go through succession. Table 47 shows the distribution of panelists who completed round 1 of the survey.

Table 47. Delphi expert panel distribution of roles

Role Served	Responses	
I have served as the Gen 1 Pastor at a multisite church that has gone through pastoral succession.	36.36%	4
I am serving or have served as the Gen 2 Pastor at a multisite church that has gone through pastoral succession.	27.27%	3
I am serving or have served as a governing board member OR a member of a pastoral leadership team for the duration of a generation 1 to generation 2 succession process.	27.27%	3
I serve as a consultant for multisite churches that have gone through the pastoral succession process.	9.09%	1
Total	100%	11

**Round 1.** Using information from the open-ended questions, as well as analysis of 20 of the 21 surveys from phase 1, 11 questions were drafted to send to the panelists. These questions were organized into three broad categories—Gen 1 Practices, Gen 2 Practices, and Organizational Practices. Prior to sending the questions, 3 multisite consultants from 3 different organizations provided feedback on the questions. These questions were then put into SurveyMonkey’s survey software and emailed to the panelists.<sup>29</sup> Table 48 shows the categories and questions.

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<sup>29</sup>See appendix 9 for instructions for round 1.

Table 48. Round 1 questions

Questions	
Gen 1 Pastor Practices	
1	At what point in ministry should a Gen 1 Pastor begin considering succession to a Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors)?
2	How should Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for their eventual succession?
3	With whom should a Gen 1 Pastor be interacting with [sic] to develop a succession plan?
4	How should a Gen 1 Pastor help prepare the Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors) for leadership?
5	Where should a Gen 1 Pastor focus after authority has been handed off to the second generation of leadership?
Gen 2 Pastor Practices	
6	In what ways should a Gen 2 Pastor prepare personally to step into the role of successor?
7	Where should a Gen 2 Pastor focus in the first twelve months after assuming leadership?
8	How should the Gen 2 Pastor of a multisite church honor the legacy of the Gen 1 Pastor?
Organizational Practices	
9	How should a multisite church prepare itself organizationally for a Gen 1 pastoral succession?
10	How should a multisite church keep its staff informed during the succession process?
11	How should a multisite church keep the congregation informed during the succession process?

Panelists were given two weeks to answer the open-ended questions in round 1. Eleven of the 12 panelists completed the round 1 survey, and those results were imported into NVivo software and also sent to each panelist. Each panelist received the answers, with their responses highlighted. Panelists were then given an opportunity to make any revisions to their answers.<sup>30</sup>

NVivo utilizes “nodes” to categorize the qualitative data. Responses were organized and read by individual question (rather than by expert),<sup>31</sup> word frequency queries and word trees were run on the responses to discern themes, and a first bank of nodes was

<sup>30</sup>No panelist made a revision.

<sup>31</sup>This process was to mitigate against potential influence that could come when organizing by expert answer. For example, knowing that one response came from a panelist I was more familiar with than another might cause bias in me as I coded my response.

created for all 11 questions. These nodes were then reviewed as a whole and combined, when possible, based upon thematic similarities. After the original bank of codes was created, the documents were re-read and coding began. When necessary, additional nodes were added.

Following coding, each question was read again and turned into statements. One hundred three practices emerged in this round. These practices were compared across questions and, when possible, combined.<sup>32</sup> This resulted in 93 final practices. Round 1 includes all 93 practices, even if only referenced by one panelist. Tables 49 through 51 show these practices (N=11).

Table 49. Gen 1 practices organized by theme

Question 1: At what point in ministry should a Gen 1 Pastor begin considering succession to a Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors)?		Percent Citing	N
1.01	At a minimum, Gen 1 pastors should consider succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).	54.55%	6
1.02	Gen 1 pastors should consider succession when realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.	27.27%	3
1.03	Gen 1 pastors should consider succession when realizing that a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists.	18.18%	2
1.04	Gen 1 pastors should consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.	18.18%	2
1.05	Gen 1 pastors should consider succession when realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.	9.09%	1
1.06	Gen 1 pastors should consider succession by the 25th year of ministry.	9.09%	1
1.07	Gen 1 pastors should consider succession when recognizing a growing inability to connect with a younger generation.	9.09%	1

<sup>32</sup>Across all question types, certain similarities emerged. One panelist might address an aspect of succession in one question, while another panelist addresses the same aspect in another question. When possible, these similarities were combined into one statement and the “percent citing” was adjusted accordingly.

Table 49 continued

Question 2: How should Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for their eventual succession?		Percent Citing	N
2.01	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by having plans on what ministry/life pursuits will be engaged after succession.	81.82%	9
2.02	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.	36.36%	4
2.03	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.	27.27%	3
2.04	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.	27.27%	3
2.05	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by patiently and prayerfully looking for a Gen 2 pastor.	27.27%	3
2.06	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	18.18%	2
2.07	Gen 1 pastors should personally prepare by strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities.	18.18%	2
2.08	Gen 1 pastors should personal prepare by focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	18.18%	2
2.09	Gen 1 pastors should personal prepare by setting the pace on the pre-succession relationship with the Gen 2 pastor.	9.09%	1
2.10	Leading their church to a reaffirmation of its core values.	9.09%	1
Question 3: With whom should a Gen 1 Pastor be interacting with to develop a succession plan?		Percent Citing	N
3.01	Gen 1 pastors should employ the services of a consultant to help develop a succession plan.	72.73%	8
3.02	Gen 1 pastors should interact with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.	72.73%	8
3.03	Gen 1 pastors should create and work with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.	45.45%	5
3.04	Gen 1 pastors should develop their plan with their spouse.	18.18%	2
3.05	Gen 1 pastors should interact with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.	18.18%	2
Question 4: How should a Gen 1 Pastor help prepare the Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors) for leadership?		Percent Citing	N
4.01	If internal succession, Gen 1 pastors should create a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities.	54.55%	6
4.02	If internal succession, Gen 1 pastors should walk closely with Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.	36.36%	4
4.03	Gen 1 pastors should stick to the succession plan and timeline.	36.36%	4
4.04	Post-succession, Gen 1 pastors should be encouragers and counselors (when called upon).	27.27%	3
4.05	Gen 1 pastors should be transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.	9.09%	1
4.06	Post-succession, Gen 1 pastors should give space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.	9.09%	1
4.07	If internal succession, Gen 1 pastors should become their friend and confidant.	9.09%	1
4.08	If internal succession, Gen 1 pastors should give Gen 2 pastor(s) exposure to the congregation prior to succession.	9.09%	1

Table 49 continued

Question 5: Where should a Gen 1 Pastor focus after authority has been handed off to the second generation of leadership?		Percent Citing	N
5.01	Gen 1 pastors should focus on their next ministry endeavor, based upon their giftings and experience.	54.55%	6
5.02	Gen 1 pastors should focus on publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.	45.45%	5
5.03	If they intend to remain at the church after succession, Gen 1 pastors should focus on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.	27.27%	3
5.04	If they intend to remain at the church after succession, Gen 1 pastors should still take a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.	18.18%	2
5.05	Gen 1 pastors should focus on coaching and mentoring leaders.	18.18%	2
5.06	Gen 1 pastors should intentionally focus away from the inner workings of the church.	18.18%	2

Table 50. Gen 2 pastor practices organized by theme

Question 6: In what ways should a Gen 2 Pastor prepare personally to step into the role of successor?		Percent Citing	N
6.01	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.	27.27%	3
6.02	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by growing in humility.	18.18%	2
6.03	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by seeking counsel from other Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors who have gone before them.	18.18%	2
6.04	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	18.18%	2
6.05	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by focusing on spiritual disciplines.	18.18%	2
6.06	If internal succession, Gen 2 pastors should prepare by shadowing the Gen 1 pastor.	18.18%	2
6.07	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by building relationships with people at all campuses.	9.09%	1
6.08	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by giving attention to their family relationships.	9.09%	1
6.09	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by reading books about transitions.	9.09%	1
6.10	Gen 2 pastors should prepare by assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.	9.09%	1

Table 50 continued

Question 7: Where should a Gen 2 Pastor focus in the first twelve months after assuming leadership?		Percent Citing	N
7.01	Gen 2 pastors should minimize large organizational changes in the first 12 months.	45.45%	5
7.02	Gen 2 pastors should develop strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).	27.27%	3
7.03	Gen 2 pastors should build trust with the church.	27.27%	3
7.04	Gen 2 pastors should pray about and communicate the vision to the appropriate groups.	27.27%	3
7.05	Gen 2 pastors should look for places to get easy wins for the church and staff.	18.18%	2
7.06	Gen 2 pastors should use the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.	18.18%	2
7.07	Gen 2 pastors should focus on preaching.	9.09%	1
7.08	Gen 2 pastors should give leadership to the staff.	9.09%	1
7.09	Gen 2 pastors should give leadership to the board.	9.09%	1
7.10	Gen 2 pastors should celebrate new successes of the church.	9.09%	1
Question 8: How should the Gen 2 Pastor of a multisite church honor the legacy of the Gen 1 Pastor?		Percent Citing	N
8.01	Gen 2 pastors should honor the legacy of Gen 1 pastors by looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.	72.73%	8
8.02	If the Gen 1 pastor remains at the church, Gen 2 pastors should honor the legacy of Gen 1 pastors by intentionally including them in appropriate areas of ministry, church celebrations, and ongoing church life.	27.27%	3
8.03	Gen 2 pastors can should the legacy of Gen 1 pastors by ensuring the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of Gen 1 pastors.	18.18%	2
8.04	Gen 2 pastors should honor the legacy of Gen 1 pastors by including them in ministry events/celebrations at the campus where Gen 1 pastor was most engaged.	9.09%	1
8.05	Gen 2 pastors should honor the legacy of Gen 1 pastors by having one-on-one meetings with the Gen 1 pastor to continue/grow the relationship.	9.09%	1

Table 51. Organizational practices organized by theme

Question 9: How should a multisite church prepare itself organizationally for a Gen 1 pastoral succession?		Percent Citing	N
9.01	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.	27.27%	3
9.02	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.	18.18%	2
9.03	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.	18.18%	2
9.04	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by determining if and how they will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.	18.18%	2
9.05	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.	18.18%	2
9.06	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by establishing an emergency succession plan.	9.09%	1
9.07	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by ensuring that they have a strong staff leadership team in place.	9.09%	1
9.08	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.	9.09%	1
9.09	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by working collaboratively with their Gen 1 pastor in developing the succession plan.	9.09%	1
9.10	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.	9.09%	1
9.11	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.	9.09%	1
9.12	Multisite churches should prepare themselves by ensuring succession is discussed years prior to any potential transition.	9.09%	1
Question 10: How should a multisite church keep its staff informed during the succession process?		Percent Citing	N
10.01	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by including the staff in the succession process—not for deciding, but for ownership.	18.18%	2
10.02	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by communicating to all staff members regularly (at a set frequency) and broadly (multiple forms).	18.18%	2
10.03	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by ensuring their staff has time to assess their future fit under Gen 2's leadership.	18.18%	2
10.04	If internal succession, multisite churches should keep their staff informed by allowing Gen 2 pastors to regularly update the staff.	18.18%	2
10.05	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by communicating with their staffs in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.	18.18%	2
10.06	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by allowing for their staff to give feedback on the process and their personal feelings/thoughts/concerns about it.	18.18%	2
10.07	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by utilizing the church's board to keep the staff informed and give regular updates.	9.09%	1
10.08	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by ensuring the staff hears the right information about succession from the right people.	9.09%	1
10.09	Multisite churches should keep their staff informed by empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.	9.09%	1



Table 51 continued

Question 11: How should a multisite church keep the congregation informed during the succession process?		Percent Citing	N
11.01	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by holding open forums for their congregations to engage leadership.	18.18%	2
11.02	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by letting the Gen 1 pastor to lead the way in communicating to the congregation.	18.18%	2
11.03	Regarding timing, multisite churches should tell the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.	18.18%	2
11.04	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by planting seeds of the need and value of succession years prior to the succession (example: through sermons).	9.09%	1
11.05	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by utilizing the church's board to explain the process to the congregation and give regular updates.	9.09%	1
11.06	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by utilizing the transition/succession team to send out regular communication to the congregation.	9.09%	1
11.07	Internal succession, multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by letting Gen 2 pastors regularly update the congregation.	9.09%	1
11.08	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.	9.09%	1
11.09	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by utilizing small group gatherings to generate greater buy-in.	9.09%	1
11.10	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.	9.09%	1
11.11	Multisite churches should keep their congregation informed by providing the congregation opportunities to express their gratitude to the Gen 1 pastor.	9.09%	1

**Round 2.** The 93 statements were used to form a four-point Likert-style survey that was sent to all 11 panelists.<sup>33</sup> Panelists were asked to rate the level of importance for each practice (from “Not at all Important” to “Extremely Important”). For each of the 11 questions, practices were randomized for each panelist. The goal of this round was to seek consensus. Consensus was set at 70 percent of panelists rating a practice as 3 or higher. Consensus emerged for 76 of the 93 practices, which are presented in tables 52-54.

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<sup>33</sup>See appendix 10.

Table 52. Gen 1 pastor practices and consensus results

Q1. How important are the following items when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors begin to consider succession?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
1.01	At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).	3.44	0.68	9	88.89%	Yes
1.02	Realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.	3.44	0.68	9	88.89%	Yes
1.03	Realizing that a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists.	3.00	0.67	9	77.78%	Yes
1.04	Committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.	3.50	0.71	8	87.50%	Yes
1.05	Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.	3.78	0.42	9	100.00%	Yes
1.06	Considering succession by the 25th year of ministry.	2.33	0.94	9	44.44%	No
1.07	Recognizing a growing inability to connect with a younger generation.	3.33	0.82	9	77.78%	Yes
Q2. How important are the following items when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for succession?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
2.01	Having plans on what ministry/life pursuits will be engaged after succession.	3.22	0.92	9	66.67%	No
2.02	Having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.	3.44	0.68	9	88.89%	Yes
2.03	Giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.	3.00	0.67	9	77.78%	Yes
2.04	Determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.	3.11	0.57	9	88.89%	Yes
2.05	Patiently and prayerfully looking for a Gen 2 pastor.	3.50	0.71	8	87.50%	Yes
2.06	Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	3.78	0.42	9	100.00%	Yes
2.07	Strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities. (Example: a teaching team)	3.11	0.57	9	88.89%	Yes
2.08	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	3.22	0.92	9	88.89%	Yes
2.09	Setting the pace on the pre-succession relationship with the Gen 2 pastor.	3.00	0.82	9	66.67%	No
2.10	Leading their church to a reaffirmation of its core values.	3.00	0.67	9	77.78%	Yes

Table 52 continued

Q3. How important are the following items when it comes to the group(s) of people with whom Gen 1 pastors should develop a succession plan?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
3.01	Employing the services of a consultant to help develop a succession plan.	2.44	0.68	9	33.33%	No
3.02	Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.	3.78	0.42	9	100.00%	Yes
3.03	Creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.	3.44	0.50	9	100.00%	Yes
3.04	Developing their plan with their spouse.	3.89	0.31	9	100.00%	Yes
3.05	Interacting with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.	3.11	0.57	9	88.89%	Yes
Q4. How important are the following items when it comes to how the Gen 1 pastors can help prepare Gen 2 pastors for leadership?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
4.01	If internal succession, creating a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s).	3.56	0.68	9	88.89%	Yes
4.02	If internal succession, walking closely with the Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.	3.33	0.82	9	77.78%	Yes
4.03	Sticking to the succession plan and timeline.	3.33	0.47	9	100.00%	Yes
4.04	Post-succession, being encouragers and counselors (when called upon).	3.11	0.74	9	77.78%	Yes
4.05	Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.	3.33	0.67	9	88.89%	Yes
4.06	Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.	4.00	0.00	9	100.00%	Yes
4.07	If internal succession, by becoming their friend and confidant.	2.44	0.96	9	33.33%	No
4.08	If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.	3.89	0.31	9	100.00%	Yes

Table 52 continued

Q5. How important are the following items when it comes to where Gen 1 pastors should focus *after* succession has been completed?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
5.01	Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.	3.22	0.42	9	100.00%	Yes
5.02	Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.	3.67	0.67	9	88.89%	Yes
5.03	If remaining at the church after succession, focusing on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.	3.22	0.63	9	88.89%	Yes
5.04	If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.	3.56	0.68	9	88.89%	Yes
5.05	Coaching and mentoring leaders.	2.00	1.05	9	33.33%	No
5.06	Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.	3.56	0.68	9	88.89%	Yes

Note: In the following tables, practices continue to be listed in ascending order by practice number (rather than by mean).

Table 53. Gen 2 pastor practices and consensus results

Q6. How important are the following items when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors personally prepare to step into the role of successor?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
6.01	Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.	3.70	0.46	10	100.00%	Yes
6.02	Growing in humility.	3.40	0.80	10	80.00%	Yes
6.03	Seeking counsel from other Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors who have gone before them.	3.20	0.60	10	90.00%	Yes
6.04	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	3.30	0.64	10	90.00%	Yes
6.05	Focusing on spiritual disciplines.	3.20	0.60	10	90.00%	Yes
6.06	If internal succession, shadowing the Gen 1 pastor.	2.90	0.83	10	60.00%	No
6.07	Building relationships with people at all campuses.	3.60	0.49	10	100.00%	Yes
6.08	Giving attention to their family relationships.	3.50	0.67	10	90.00%	Yes
6.09	Reading books about transitions.	2.70	0.64	10	60.00%	No
6.10	Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.	3.30	0.46	10	100.00%	Yes

Table 53 continued

Q7. How important are the following items when it comes to where Gen 2 pastors should focus during their first twelve months after assuming leadership?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
7.01	Minimizing large organizational changes.	3.10	0.70	10	80.00%	Yes
7.02	Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).	3.70	0.46	10	100.00%	Yes
7.03	Building trust with the church.	3.90	0.30	10	100.00%	Yes
7.04	Praying about and communicating the vision to the appropriate groups.	3.30	0.90	10	70.00%	Yes
7.05	Looking for places to get easy wins for the church and staff.	3.40	0.66	10	90.00%	Yes
7.06	Using the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.	3.00	0.77	10	90.00%	Yes
7.07	Giving attention to preaching.	3.20	0.60	10	90.00%	Yes
7.08	Providing leadership to the staff.	3.70	0.46	10	100.00%	Yes
7.09	Providing leadership to the board.	3.50	0.50	10	100.00%	Yes
7.10	Celebrating new successes of the church.	3.20	0.75	10	80.00%	Yes
Q8. How important are the following items when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors can honor the legacy of the Gen 1 pastor?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
8.01	Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.	3.20	0.75	10	80.00%	Yes
8.02	If the Gen 1 pastor remains at the church, intentionally including them in appropriate areas of ministry, church celebrations, and ongoing church life.	2.80	0.60	10	70.00%	Yes
8.03	Ensuring the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.	3.50	0.50	10	100.00%	Yes
8.04	Including the Gen 1 pastor in ministry events/celebrations at the campus where Gen 1 pastor was most engaged.	2.80	0.75	10	60.00%	No
8.05	Having one-on-one meetings with the Gen 1 pastor to continue/grow the relationship.	2.80	0.75	10	60.00%	No

Table 54. Organizational practices and consensus results

Q9. How important are the following items when it comes to how a multisite church prepares itself organizationally for pastoral succession?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
9.01	Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.	3.20	0.75	10	80.00%	Yes
9.02	Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.	3.80	0.40	10	100.00%	Yes
9.03	Addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.	3.40	0.66	10	90.00%	Yes
9.04	Determining if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.	3.10	0.70	10	80.00%	Yes
9.05	Addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.	3.10	0.54	10	90.00%	Yes
9.06	Establishing an emergency succession plan.	2.90	0.83	10	60.00%	No
9.07	Ensuring that the church has a strong staff leadership team in place.	3.60	0.66	10	90.00%	Yes
9.08	Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.	3.60	0.49	10	100.00%	Yes
9.09	Working collaboratively with the Gen 1 pastor in developing the succession plan.	3.50	0.50	10	100.00%	Yes
9.10	Ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.	3.10	0.70	10	80.00%	Yes
9.11	Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.	3.40	0.66	10	90.00%	Yes
9.12	Ensuring succession is discussed years prior to any potential transition.	2.60	1.02	10	60.00%	No
Q10. How important are the following items when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its staff informed during the succession process?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
10.01	Including the staff in the succession process—not for deciding, but for ownership.	2.80	0.75	10	60.00%	No
10.02	Communicating to all staff members regularly (at a set frequency) and broadly (multiple forms).	3.50	0.50	10	100.00%	Yes
10.03	Ensuring their staff has time to assess their future fit under Gen 2's leadership.	3.30	0.78	10	80.00%	Yes
10.04	If internal succession, allowing Gen 2 pastors to regularly update the staff.	3.30	0.46	10	100.00%	Yes
10.05	Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.	3.80	0.40	10	100.00%	Yes
10.06	Allowing for their staff to give feedback on the process and their personal feelings/thoughts/concerns about it.	3.00	0.89	10	60.00%	No
10.07	Utilizing the church's board to keep the staff informed and give regular updates.	2.60	1.11	10	50.00%	No

Table 54 continued

10.08	Ensuring the staff hears the right information about succession from the right people.	3.70	0.64	10	90.00%	Yes
10.09	Empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.	3.10	0.70	10	80.00%	Yes
Q11. How important are the following items when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its congregation informed during the succession process?						
	Practice	Mean	SD	N	Percent at 3 or 4	Met Consensus
11.01	Holding open forums for their congregation to engage leadership.	2.70	0.78	10	50.00%	No
11.02	Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.	3.30	1.00	10	80.00%	Yes
11.03	Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.	3.20	0.98	10	80.00%	Yes
11.04	Planting seeds of the need and value of succession years prior to the succession (example: through sermons).	3.00	1.00	10	70.00%	Yes
11.05	Utilizing the church's board to explain the process to the congregation and give regular updates.	3.10	0.70	10	80.00%	Yes
11.06	Utilizing the transition/succession team to send out regular communication to the congregation.	3.10	0.83	10	90.00%	Yes
11.07	If internal succession, letting Gen 2 pastors regularly update the congregation.	2.50	0.92	10	60.00%	No
11.08	Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.	3.40	0.66	10	90.00%	Yes
11.09	Utilizing small group gatherings to generate greater buy-in.	2.90	0.94	10	70.00%	Yes
11.10	Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.	3.70	0.46	10	100.00%	Yes
11.11	Providing the congregation opportunities to express their gratitude to the Gen 1 pastor.	3.80	0.40	10	100.00%	Yes

Further, of the statements that gained consensus, 25 of the statements had 100 percent consensus before any panelists made revisions to comments. These practices might be considered core practices for pastoral succession. Table 55 shows the practices, sorted by mean score. While many of the practices might be considered in multisite and single-site succession, practices 5 and 15 focus on practices specifically for campuses of the church.

Table 55. Top 25 succession practices

Ranked Number	Round 2 Number	Category <sup>34</sup>	Practice	Mean	SD
1	4.06	Gen 1	Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.	4.00	0.00
2	7.03	Gen 2	Building trust with the church.	3.90	0.30
3	3.04	Gen 1	Developing their plan with their spouse.	3.89	0.31
4	4.08	Gen 1	If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.	3.89	0.31
5	9.02	Org	Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.	3.80	0.40
6	10.05	Org	Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.	3.80	0.40
7	11.11	Org	Providing the congregation opportunities to express their gratitude to the Gen 1 pastor.	3.80	0.40
8	1.05	Gen 1	Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.	3.78	0.42
9	2.06	Gen 1	Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	3.78	0.42
10	3.02	Gen 1	Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.	3.78	0.42
11	6.01	Gen 2	Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.	3.70	0.46
12	7.02	Gen 2	Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).	3.70	0.46
13	7.08	Gen 2	Providing leadership to the staff.	3.70	0.46
14	11.10	Org	Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.	3.70	0.46
15	6.07	Gen 2	Building relationships with people at all campuses.	3.60	0.49
16	9.08	Org	Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.	3.60	0.49
17	7.09	Gen 2	Providing leadership to the board.	3.50	0.50
18	8.03	Gen 2	Ensuring the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.	3.50	0.50
19	9.09	Org	Working collaboratively with the Gen 1 pastor in developing the succession plan.	3.50	0.50
20	10.02	Org	Communicating to all staff members regularly (at a set frequency) and broadly (multiple forms).	3.50	0.50
21	3.03	Gen 1	Creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.	3.44	0.50
22	4.03	Gen 1	Sticking to the succession plan and timeline.	3.33	0.47

<sup>34</sup>“Category” refers to where the broader practice was located in the survey—as something for Gen 1 pastors, Gen 2 pastors, or the entire organization.



*Table 55 continued*

23	6.10	Gen 2	Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.	3.30	0.46
24	10.04	Org	If internal succession, allowing Gen 2 pastors to regularly update the staff.	3.30	0.46
25	5.01	Gen 1	Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.	3.22	0.42

The conclusion of round 2 resulted in 76 practices finding consensus. After removing non-consensus responses, round 3's survey was developed and sent to the panelists. Panelists were also sent data on where they were out of consensus on round 2 and were offered an opportunity to respond.<sup>35</sup> Round 3 still had a 70 percent consensus goal, except this time panelists were asked to select "agree" or "disagree" when it came to the value of each practice. All 76 practices met the 70 percent threshold for consensus from the 10 panelists. Tables 56-58 show each practice (re-numbered from round 2 now that non-consensus responses have been removed), the number of panelists that responded to each practice, and the percent of those panelists in agreement.

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<sup>35</sup>See appendix 11 for expert responses to consensus. After one expert changed responses on two questions, two other practices from round 2 met 100 percent consensus: practice 1.01 ("at a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement [or next ministry season]) and practice 1.02 ("realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time").

Table 56. Round 3 Gen 1 pastor practices

Q1: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors begin to consider succession?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
1.01	Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.	10	100.00%
1.02	At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).	10	100.00%
1.03	Realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.	10	100.00%
1.04	Committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.	10	100.00%
1.05	Realizing that a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists.	10	70.00%
1.06	Recognizing a growing inability to connect with a younger generation.	10	80.00%
Q2: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for succession?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
2.01	Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	10	100.00%
2.02	Having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.	10	100.00%
2.03	Determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.	10	80.00%
2.04	Strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities. (Example: a teaching team)	10	80.00%
2.05	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	10	90.00%
2.06	Patiently and prayerfully looking for a Gen 2 pastor.	9	77.78%
2.07	Giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.	10	90.00%
2.08	Leading their church to a reaffirmation of its core values.	10	70.00%
Q3: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to the group(s) of people with whom Gen 1 pastors should develop a succession plan?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
3.01	Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.	10	100.00%
3.02	Creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.	10	90.00%
3.03	Developing their plan with their spouse.	10	100.00%
3.04	Interacting with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.	10	100.00%

Table 56 continued

Q4: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how the Gen 1 pastors can help prepare Gen 2 pastors for leadership?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
4.01	Sticking to the succession plan and timeline.	10	90.00%
4.02	Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.	10	100.00%
4.03	If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.	10	100.00%
4.04	If internal succession, creating a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s).	10	90.00%
4.05	Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.	10	100.00%
4.06	If internal succession, walking closely with the Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.	10	90.00%
4.07	Post-succession, being encouragers and counselors (when called upon).	10	100.00%
Q5: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to where Gen 1 pastors should focus after succession has been completed?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
5.01	Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.	10	100.00%
5.02	Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.	10	100.00%
5.03	If remaining at the church after succession, focusing on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.	10	80.00%
5.04	If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.	10	90.00%
5.05	Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.	10	100.00%

Table 57. Round 3 Gen 2 pastor practices

Q6: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors personally prepare to step into the role of successor?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
6.01	Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.	10	100.00%
6.02	Building relationships with people at all campuses.	10	100.00%
6.03	Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.	10	90.00%
6.04	Seeking counsel from other Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors who have gone before them.	10	90.00%
6.05	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	10	100.00%
6.06	Focusing on spiritual disciplines.	10	100.00%
6.07	Giving attention to their family relationships.	10	100.00%
6.08	Growing in humility.	10	80.00%
Q7: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to where Gen 2 pastors should focus during their first twelve months after assuming leadership?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
7.01	Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).	10	100.00%
7.02	Building trust with the church.	10	100.00%
7.03	Providing leadership to the staff.	10	90.00%
7.04	Providing leadership to the board.	10	100.00%
7.05	Looking for places to get easy wins for the church and staff.	10	90.00%
7.06	Using the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.	10	80.00%
7.07	Giving attention to preaching.	10	100.00%
7.08	Minimizing large organizational changes.	10	80.00%
7.09	Celebrating new successes of the church.	10	90.00%
7.10	Praying about and communicating the vision to the appropriate groups.	10	100.00%
Q8: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors can honor the legacy of the Gen 1 pastor?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
8.01	Ensuring the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.	10	90.00%
8.02	Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.	10	100.00%
8.03	If the Gen 1 pastor remains at the church, intentionally including them in appropriate areas of ministry, church celebrations, and ongoing church life.	10	80.00%

Table 58. Round 3 organizational practices

Q9: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how a multisite church prepares itself organizationally for pastoral succession?			
Practice Number	Practice	Response Count	Percent in Agreement
9.01	Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.	10	100.00%
9.02	Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.	10	100.00%
9.03	Working collaboratively with the Gen 1 pastor in developing the succession plan.	10	80.00%
9.04	Addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.	10	100.00%
9.05	Addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.	10	90.00%
9.06	Ensuring that the church has a strong staff leadership team in place.	10	90.00%
9.07	Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.	10	100.00%
9.08	Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.	10	100.00%
9.09	Determining if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.	10	90.00%
9.10	Ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.	10	80.00%
Q10: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its staff informed during the succession process?			
10.01	Communicating to all staff members regularly (at a set frequency) and broadly (multiple forms).	10	90.00%
10.02	If internal succession, allowing Gen 2 pastors to regularly update the staff.	10	90.00%
10.03	Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.	10	100.00%
10.04	Ensuring the staff hears the right information about succession from the right people.	10	90.00%
10.05	Ensuring their staff has time to assess their future fit under Gen 2's leadership.	10	90.00%
10.06	Empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.	10	90.00%
Q11: Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its congregation informed during the succession process?			
11.01	Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.	10	100.00%
11.02	Providing the congregation opportunities to express their gratitude to the Gen 1 pastor.	10	90.00%
11.03	Utilizing the transition/succession team to send out regular communication to the congregation.	10	90.00%
11.04	Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.	10	100.00%
11.05	Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.	10	100.00%

Table 58 continued

11.06	Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.	10	100.00%
11.07	Utilizing the church's board to explain the process to the congregation and give regular updates.	10	90.00%
11.08	Planting seeds of the need and value of succession years prior to the succession (example: through sermons).	10	90.00%
11.09	Utilizing small group gatherings to generate greater buy-in.	10	80.00%

Where round 2 had 25 practices that met 100 percent consensus, round 3 produced 37 practices that met 100 percent consensus. Comparing the 37 practices with the 25 practices of round 2 resulted in 16 practices that met 100 percent consensus in both round 2 and round 3. Table 59 lists all 37 practices by category (not by mean as in round 2, since panelists were only answering “agree” or “disagree” in round 3) and where the same practices ranked on round 2.

Table 59. Top 37 practices from round 3

N	Round 3 Number	Category	Practice	In Round 2 Top 25?	Number in Top 25
1	1.01	Gen 1	Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.	Yes	8
2	1.02	Gen 1	At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).	--	--
3	1.03	Gen 1	Realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.	--	--
4	1.04	Gen 1	Committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.	--	--
5	2.01	Gen 1	Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	Yes	9
6	2.02	Gen 1	Having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.	--	--
7	3.01	Gen 1	Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.	Yes	10
8	3.03	Gen 1	Developing their plan with their spouse.	Yes	3
9	3.04	Gen 1	Interacting with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.	--	--
10	4.02	Gen 1	Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.	Yes	1
11	4.03	Gen 1	If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.	Yes	4

Table 59 continued

12	4.05	Gen 1	Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.	--	--
13	4.07	Gen 1	Post-succession, being encouragers and counselors (when called upon).	--	--
14	5.01	Gen 1	Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.	Yes	25
15	5.02	Gen 1	Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.	--	--
16	5.05	Gen 1	Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.	--	--
17	6.01	Gen 2	Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.	Yes	11
18	6.02	Gen 2	Building relationships with people at all campuses.	Yes	15
19	6.05	Gen 2	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	--	--
20	6.06	Gen 2	Focusing on spiritual disciplines.	--	--
21	6.07	Gen 2	Giving attention to their family relationships.	--	--
22	7.01	Gen 2	Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).	Yes	12
23	7.02	Gen 2	Building trust with the church.	Yes	2
24	7.04	Gen 2	Providing leadership to the board.	Yes	17
25	7.07	Gen 2	Giving attention to preaching.	--	--
26	7.10	Gen 2	Praying about and communicating the vision to the appropriate groups.	--	--
27	8.02	Gen 2	Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.	--	--
28	9.01	Org	Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.	Yes	5
29	9.02	Org	Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.	Yes	16
30	9.04	Org	Addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.	--	--
31	9.07	Org	Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.	--	--
32	9.08	Org	Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.	--	--
33	10.03	Org	Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.	Yes	6
34	11.01	Org	Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.	Yes	14
35	11.04	Org	Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.	--	--
36	11.05	Org	Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.	--	--
37	11.06	Org	Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.	--	--

Table 60 takes the 16 practices with 100 percent consensus from rounds 2 and 3 and organizes them by mean score from round 2. These 16 practices mark core practices of pastoral succession—with 15 of the top 17 practices staying in both rounds.

Table 60. Top 16 core practices of multisite succession

N	Round 3 Number	Category	Practice	Round 2 Number
1	4.02	Gen 1	Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.	1
2	7.02	Gen 2	Building trust with the church.	2
3	3.03	Gen 1	Developing their plan with their spouse.	3
4	4.03	Gen 1	If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.	4
5	9.01	Org	Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.	5
6	10.03	Org	Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.	6
7	1.01	Gen 1	Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.	8
8	2.01	Gen 1	Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	9
9	3.01	Gen 1	Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.	10
10	6.01	Gen 2	Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.	11
11	7.01	Gen 2	Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).	12
12	11.01	Org	Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.	14
13	6.02	Gen 2	Building relationships with people at all campuses.	15
14	9.02	Org	Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.	16
15	7.04	Gen 2	Providing leadership to the board.	17
16	5.01	Gen 1	Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.	25

### Evaluation of Research Design

With phase 1 and phase 2 of this research completed, what remains is (1) a survey-driven snapshot of succession events at multisite churches around the United States and (2) a list of expert-decided best practices for succession within multisite churches. This study has been exploratory in nature since very little formal research has been done



on pastoral succession within multisite churches. As such, the study has seven weaknesses and strengths that will be considered.

### **Weaknesses**

There are several weaknesses in this research design. Phase 1's weaknesses revolve around research question wording, population size, and some specific item wording within the survey itself. Phase 2's weaknesses revolve around the breadth of the practices and the timing of the methodology itself.

**Phase 1 weaknesses.** As research progressed, I began finding ways that the research questions could have been worded to aid clarity and findings. For example, RQ1 states, "How do multisite church leaders report their succession process from generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession?" This question took the bulk of phase 1's results and became too broad in scope. The question could have been broken into the different elements of the survey to help clarity and analysis. The metric data presented at the end of the survey could have been its own research question altogether, rather than part of RQ1. While each research question did have results, clearer wording could have resulted in better findings.

A second weakness of phase 1 was the population size. The ultimate goal of this research was to present a census of churches that have gone through succession; however, gaining absolute certainty on the population is elusive. It would be difficult for any researcher or research group to find every instance of pastoral succession within multisite churches.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Before starting the research, I had originally asked a church succession author and practitioner if he knew of churches that would fit my population (his group having done hundreds of church job placements throughout the country, it seemed wise to ask someone more connected than I was). His best advice was to do internet searches to find my population. William Vanderbloemen, telephone interview with author, March 3, 2016

A third weakness in phase 1 was in some of the wording of the survey items themselves. The survey had multiple people interacting on it, but certain aspects could have been strengthened. For example, question 9 asks how many campuses the church had at the time of succession. However, there is not a follow-up question that is as specific. Rather, question 34 asks about what happened to the campuses since succession. A repeat of question 9 would have made it easier to compare how many campuses existed before and after succession in each church instance. Question 25 asked if the “Gen 2 pastor(s) [had] a familial relation to the Gen 1 pastor.” Multiple respondents selected “yes.” However, after follow-up, I realized that they did not read the question correctly. They read “familial” as “familiar.” This question required follow-up with multiple churches to be sure that the right answer was accounted for. Question 25 could have been simplified to ask if the pastors were “related.” These small changes would have offered more specific data in each church instance and, thus, more to contribute to the study.

**Phase 2 weaknesses.** The Delphi portion of the study netted good practices, but it still has some weaknesses. First, the Delphi portion resulted in 76 total practices—which is quite a large number. Seventy-six practices become a large amount of practices for any practitioner to go through and learn from. Changing the consensus threshold would have provided fewer practices (thus the reason for the provided list of the top 25 practices, top 37 practices, and core 16 practices), but the 70 percent threshold only slightly reduced the number of original practices.

A second weakness was the timing of the Delphi. While the methodology had a high degree of participation from round to round, panelists offered little feedback after submitting each round’s survey. Only two panelists offered feedback on practices on which they were out of consensus in round 2. This was, perhaps, in part because the timing of the Delphi was November and December of 2017. These are busy months for pastors and church leaders and, thus, leaders were only contributing what was absolutely essential to the study, which was filling out each individual survey.

## **Strengths**

At the same time, being an exploratory study, several aspects of the research methodology proved helpful. Phase 1's strengths included the survey implementation process, expert feedback, and diversity of churches represented. Phase 2's strengths include the panelist composition, the Delphi process, and the practical nature of the responses.

**Phase 1 strengths.** While only 21 churches participated in the study, the actual implementation of the study was a strength. The survey asked for lots of information, and only a few people on staff would be able to answer the questions it asked. Further, the survey asked for metric data from multiple years of church life, and 20 out of 21 churches provided most or all of that data. A lot of work was done prior to survey implementation to make the survey process go as smoothly as possible. That pre-work led to a high rate of completion from the churches. In fact, though some churches consented to take the survey and ended up not participating, 100 percent of the churches that started the survey finished the survey.

Another strength from phase 1 was the amount of people who helped to create the survey. A research design expert helped build the structure and items of the survey, and multiple experts from around the country spoke into the content of the survey. This participation demonstrated a good amount of buy-in to the study itself. Panelists commented that the survey was easy to follow and were grateful to be a part of the study.

A third strength of the study was the diversity of churches taking the survey. All in all, these 21 churches give church leaders examples of 21 unique instances of multisite succession. While more churches would have been helpful, finding even 21 will help future leaders. Further, even for the sample, the study represented multiple denominations with different theological leanings from sixteen different states. Multisite is often a product of large churches and large budgets (usually found in the south), but the most represented state in the study was Minnesota, with four churches. This shows that

multisite is widespread within the United States and the need for further research into succession will only grow.

**Phase 2 strengths.** The diversity of churches that participated in phase 1 of the research led to a good group of panelists to ask to participate in phase 2's Delphi. Since the study used a homogenous group of experts (all having experienced succession in a multisite church), the goal was to have interaction from 11 panelists throughout the study. The panelist makeup resulted in a strong list of practices. The leaders who interacted in the study all had direct experience with succession and represent a diversity of theological perspectives and succession processes. Thus, to come to consensus on these practices gives a lot for future churches to glean from.

The Delphi process itself is also a strength. Through the process, leaders from all over the country provided data in an anonymous fashion. This anonymity kept panelists from skewing their answers or deferring to another panelist with more experience in succession—putting all panelists on equal ground.

Finally, the practical nature of the findings is a strength. While phase 1 focused upon what churches have done, phase 2 gives promise for churches that want to go through succession. The categorization of the practices (Gen 1, Gen 2, or the whole organization) allows future leaders of these areas to consider specific ways they can undergo succession. They might not need or want to follow through with every practice, but they can focus in on the key aspects of the practice that will help aid in the success of their own process.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter summarized the research findings that (1) sought to understand the succession process multisite churches have gone through and (2) developed best practices for future churches that desire to go through succession. Phase 1 involved a survey of 21 multisite churches that have previously gone through pastoral succession. Information for phase 1 offered details on how churches chose a successor, how long the

succession process took, the amount of internal and external succession, and the influences succession had on certain common metrics in church life. Phase 2 involved a Delphi panel used to understand best practices of multisite succession. The results of phase 2 was 76 practices that, when evaluated for practices that found 100 percent consensus between rounds 2 and 3, produces 16 “core” practices.

While there were numerous strengths and weaknesses to the study (outlined herein), this study is one of the first of its kind to a field that will only need to be further researched in the coming years. The findings are primary, but these results offer multiple areas of application for churches and church leaders. Chapter 5 moves into areas of application, as well as future areas of research to add to the growing literature base.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

This two-phase sequential mixed-methods design utilized a phenomenological survey in phase 1 and the Delphi methodology in phase 2 in order to better understand pastoral succession in multisite churches. The project provided unique insights into 21 different succession events and developed a list of best practices for multisite succession. Further, the research adds to the literature base by (1) bringing succession data to the broader multisite community and (2) providing multisite churches with tangible practices that can help them in their own succession process. The research questions that guided this design were as follows:

1. How do multisite church leaders report their succession process from generation 1 to generation 2 pastoral succession?
2. How does multisite organizational structure influence pastoral succession strategy?
3. What aspects of the inherited multisite church remained after succession?
4. What lessons have multisite leaders who have completed the succession process learned?
5. What do experts in multisite pastoral succession believe are the best practices of a succession plan for multisite churches?

This chapter concludes the study by (1) explaining the major implications of the research, (2) providing applications for churches and church leaders, (3) consolidating the research into a suggested succession roadmap, (4) speaking to some of the research limitations, and (5) encouraging areas for further research.

#### **Research Implications**

After evaluating both research phases, numerous observations exist for churches and church leaders. However, a review of the data produces ten implications: (1) effective

succession starts early and ends late, (2) ministry stability in multisite is essential, (3) succession influences metrics to varying degrees, (4) larger structures need more assistance, (5) multiplication continues after succession, (6) campus futures are not set in stone, (7) clear communication makes the process much smoother, (8) the best succession processes leverage a team, (9) clear succession plans strengthen the process, and (10) clear similarities exist between single-site and multisite succession. While these implications were seen throughout the phases of research, implications 1, 2, and 3 relate to RQ1, implication 4 relates to RQ2, implications 5 and 6 relate to RQ3, implications 7, 8, and 9 relate to RQ4, and implication 10 relates to RQ5. It should be noted that, along with implication 10, phase 2's best practices support most of the implications. As appropriate, this chapter supplies phase 2's practices when it helps explain the implications.

### **Effective Succession Starts Early and Ends Late**

Timing is not the only factor in succession, but, generally, churches that devoted adequate time (often multiple years) to their process found their succession more effective. However, succession does not actually end when the baton is passed. Rather, succession planning carries on months (or even years) into second-generation leadership—notably in how the Gen 1 pastor engages with the church post-succession.

Of the 21 churches surveyed, 7 had a succession process that was 4 years or longer, 8 had a succession process between 2 and 4 years, 4 had a process between 1 and 2 years, and 2 had a process that was 12 months or less.<sup>1</sup> Succession does not start immediately but is often mulled by the Gen 1 pastor before the process gets in motion. Further, with internal successions, churches often had a period of mentoring that lasted multiple years, in many instances.<sup>2</sup> Bob Russell, well-known for his single-site

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<sup>1</sup>See table 20 for these breakdowns.

<sup>2</sup>See table 27 for specific breakdowns. Of the eighteen churches that answered Q28, one-third

succession in Kentucky, echoes this idea: “Generally speaking, two or three years should be a sufficient amount of time for the successor to learn the role, identify with the congregation, and develop his own strategy.”<sup>3</sup>

Along with the duration of the plan, however, one should consider the age of the Gen 1 pastor at succession. According to this study, the average age of a Gen 1 pastor at succession was 63 years (see table 28). This result means that, generally, Gen 1 pastors in this study began to think about, discuss, and plan their succession by their mid to late fifties. Successors had an average age of 42,<sup>4</sup> which means that the Gen 2 pastors in this study were often in their late thirties when they were being considered for senior leadership.

Further, Gen 1 pastors often stayed involved in their churches in some regard post-succession. Question 37 asked how the Gen 1 pastor engaged in the church post-succession, and, in most of the cases, the Gen 1 pastor was still at the church (see table 30). Combine this information with practice 2.01<sup>5</sup> from phase 2 of the study, and the data only strengthens the case that succession planning goes beyond the actual transfer of leadership. Practice 2.01 states that Gen 1 pastors need to “[have] a clear plan on how they will/won’t engage with the church after succession.”

This data means that succession is not ultimately an event but a process that requires planning several years before the power transfer, all the way through several years after the transfer. This finding strengthens what succession consultant Will Heath has determined is the “7-year window.” Heath defines this window as “the period of time

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had a mentoring process that took two years or longer.

<sup>3</sup>Bob Russell, *Transition Plan* (Louisville: Minister’s Label, 2010), 61.

<sup>4</sup>The age gap of 21 years is similar to Vanderbloemen and Bird’s research. They found an average age difference of 22 years. William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird, *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 148.

<sup>5</sup>Also practice 8 from the list of the top 16 core practices in table 60.



that extends anywhere from 3-5 years before the current leader formally transitions to 2-4 years after.”<sup>6</sup> The most effective succession plans do work prior to succession, during succession, and after succession.

### **Ministry Stability in Multisite Is Essential**

Part of the reason for a longer succession perspective has to do with creating a smooth and stable process, and multisite churches focus on this during their succession. Rather than cause significant disruptions in the ministry, or allow an interim period, multisite churches emphasized stability in multiple ways. (1) Churches promoted Gen 2 leaders from within at a high rate, (2) Gen 2 responsibilities were, at times, divided into multiple roles that helped take the load off of the second generation of leadership, and (3) Gen 2 pastors were encouraged to limit significant organizational changes as they began their tenure.

**Number of internal hires.** Of the 35 churches looked at for hiring strategy, 28 had an internal succession,<sup>7</sup> and the Gen 1 and 2 pastors in 7 of those 28 successions were related.<sup>8</sup> Of the 7 churches that had external successions, 3 are from a denomination that appoints pastors, so the hire would likely be an outside hire regardless. Internal hires are often well-known organizationally and already have the church’s unique culture embedded within them. The most common prior staff role of the Gen 2 pastor was a campus pastor, followed by an executive pastor—roles that often have a high degree of

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<sup>6</sup>Will Heath, “5 Critical Conversations in Succession Planning,” accessed October 16, 2017, <http://visionroom.com/5-critical-conversations-succession-planning/>. For Heath, this window is all about keeping the organization stable over the entire transition period and protecting it over time.

<sup>7</sup>See table 29 and appendix 6.

<sup>8</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 68, note that in some instances, “multigenerational pastorates within a family can . . . bring stability.” Their example of this is Bethany Church in Baton Rouge, LA. While Bethany did not participate in the study, their succession was used when comparing internal familial successions.

visibility and knowledge of the church.<sup>9</sup> These two staff roles made up 11 of the 25 prior Gen 2 pastor roles (see table 26). Further, as seen regarding the duration of succession, there is often a years-long season of mentoring between the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastor(s), which allows for Gen 2 pastors to learn the church and the role better. From these observations, what appears important in multisite succession is continuing the culture and work that was started, rather than establishing a brand-new work.<sup>10</sup>

**Potential for varied Gen 2 roles.** Multisite succession provides a unique way for Gen 2 pastors to function at their specific church. In every church examined, there was a singular Gen 1 pastor; yet in three succession instances, the church transitioned to a plurality of Gen 2 pastors. In these instances, Gen 1 leaders realized that a different type of leadership was needed for a new generation of church life, which resulted in Gen 2 pastors dividing the organizational and preaching responsibilities of the job.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not this phenomenon of transitioning to a team of pastors exists equally in multisite and single-site churches is yet to be seen, but the change shows that Gen 1 pastors realize the

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<sup>9</sup>Specifically for the value of campus pastors within multisite, see Warren Bird, “Campus Pastor as Key to Multisite Success,” Leadership Network, 2015, accessed October 6, 2015, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Campus\\_Pastor\\_as\\_Key\\_to\\_Multisite\\_Success.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Campus_Pastor_as_Key_to_Multisite_Success.pdf). One can also engage Jamus Edwards’ Ph.D. dissertation for a greater understanding of issues of authority and autonomy within multisite churches. Jamus Howell Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics in Multisite Churches: A Quantitative Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

<sup>10</sup>When asked about a part of the process the church would keep (part of RQ4), one respondent wrote, “There was a priority to continue the momentum of ministry taking place and therefore to seriously look at existing staff” (table 45). This finding could mean that, to a degree, we have yet to see multisite succession that demanded a great deal of revitalization and, thus, unique outside hires that help revitalize a struggling church. Outside hires often come in to change what was rather than continue it, and multisite succession (thus far) has focused upon continuing the ministry rather than drastically changing it.

<sup>11</sup>While not included in this research, Willow Creek Community Church shares this reasoning. On Willow Creek Community Church, “Willow Creek Succession Update,” accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/succession>, they write,

The decision to divide the senior pastor position into two roles became clear as Bill and the Elders began working to craft a job description that was both effective and sustainable. They realized the needs of large churches have changed dramatically since Bill took on the role of senior pastor back in 1975—and a new model of dual leadership, in which each leader can function within their strongest area of giftedness, makes sense for Willow Creek in this new day.

demands of the type of leadership needed for a new generation require multiple pastors leading. This division of labor—based upon the Gen 2 pastors’ gifts—helps to bring organizational consistency to the multisite environment.

**Little immediate Gen 2 changes.** A third and final aspect of organizational stability relates to how Gen 2 pastors were encouraged to limit organizational changes. Three practices demonstrate the value of culture and minimizing changes. First, practice 6.01 encourages Gen 2 pastors to “[take] time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.” This practice was met with 100 percent consensus from panelists. Practice 7.06, which discussed what Gen 2 pastors should do in their first twelve months, speaks of church culture, specifically that Gen 2 pastors should “[use] the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.” This practice found 80 percent consensus and is interesting because the culture is built with the Gen 1 staff—not new staff. The current staff will be able to make some changes to church culture but also have a deep knowledge of the current church culture and, thus, will likely not make *drastic* organizational changes. The final practice, also categorized under a Gen 2 pastor’s first twelve months, states that Gen 2 pastors should focus on “minimizing large organizational changes.”<sup>12</sup>

These three observations demonstrate that multisite churches are concerned with how their culture continues into a new generation of leadership. Through the number of internal hires, the varied Gen 2 roles, and the encouragement for Gen 2 pastors to limit large changes right away, one realizes that stability in succession is an important factor in multisite succession.

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<sup>12</sup>Practice 7.08, which also found 80 percent consensus.

## **Succession Influences Metrics to Varying Degrees**

One practical reason to seek stability is that multisite churches are large organizations with big staffs, big attendance, and big budgets. The median general giving for the 16 churches that provided data was \$5,635,854, and the median attendance of those churches was 2,574 (see tables 17, 19). The degree of significance of succession upon these metrics and baptisms, though, is variable. Table 33 represented t-test analysis of attendance and found that, with 95 percent confidence, succession influenced attendance in 5 out of 8 churches—3 had positive growth and 2 had negative growth. However, growth in one area did not mean that churches necessarily grew the same in baptisms or in giving (see tables 34, 35). While the sample size of churches was small,<sup>13</sup> a preliminary conclusion requiring further investigation is that attendance growth (a common marker of church health in the evangelical world) at succession does not necessarily track through other areas that are often measured.<sup>14</sup> Thus, if churches wanted to project the influence of succession on certain common aspects of church life, they would likely have a difficult time knowing what might or might not be influenced.

## **Larger Structures Need More Assistance**

Research question 2 focused on organizational structure and potential influences that it has on pastoral succession strategy. The data showed that larger churches with video incorporated into their teaching used consultants to help them plan their process. More than geographical distribution of campuses, it was the size of the

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<sup>13</sup>Only eight churches provided the seven years of metric data needed to run the analysis.

<sup>14</sup>Gary May's study on SBC churches pre- and post-succession had similar findings. While different succession types influenced certain church metrics, no one succession method proved most effective. See Gary Royce May, "An Analysis of Selected Variables That Influence Postsuccession Performance in Southern Baptist Churches" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 116-21.

church that influenced succession strategy.<sup>15</sup> Only 5 churches (23.81 percent) utilized consultants, but those churches all employed video in the sermon delivery process and the churches had a median attendance of 5,513.<sup>16</sup> Thus, churches that used a consultant were some of the largest churches in the study by attendance. This finding aligns with previous thoughts about church size and the compounding complexity size brings to any organizational structure.<sup>17</sup> Having this size-generated complexity does not mean that all larger multisite churches will use a consultant for succession, but that those churches might use more support in their succession.<sup>18</sup>

### **Multiplication Continues after Succession**

Further research would be needed to verify this finding, but a notable finding in the survey research was that churches that directly sponsored church planting *post*-succession were already planting churches *pre*-succession.<sup>19</sup> Since time has continued to

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<sup>15</sup>See data and explanations on tables 36 and 37.

<sup>16</sup>Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics,” 198-99, found an increased trend toward live preaching in his study. This might be the case when considering the distribution of all multisite churches. At the same time, larger multisite churches (by attendance and number of campuses) have a greater chance of utilizing video. See Warren Bird, “Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard: Faster Growth, More New Believers and Greater Lay Participation,” Leadership Network, 2014, accessed October 16, 2017, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014\\_LN\\_Generis\\_Multisite\\_Church\\_Scorecard\\_Report\\_v2.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014_LN_Generis_Multisite_Church_Scorecard_Report_v2.pdf), 17-18.

<sup>17</sup>Brad House and Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 175-76, address this concept in reference to money. While some might believe that the multisite model saves money and increases efficiency, House and Allison argue that multisite actually increases complexity and costs. Tim Keller echoes this sentiment in talking about church size. Keller observes, “The difference between how churches of 100 and 1,000 function may be much greater than the difference between a Presbyterian and a Baptist church of the same size. The staff person who goes from a church of 400 to a church of 2,000 is in many ways making a far greater change than if he or she moved from one denomination to another.” Tim Keller, *Leadership and Church Size Dynamics: How Strategy Changes with Growth* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2006), 1.

<sup>18</sup>It should be noted that round 1 of the Delphi did include the potential of using consultants (see table 49, practice 3.01). However, that practice had a mean rating of 2.44 and only had 33.33 percent of the experts rating the item as valuable.

<sup>19</sup>See table 43 for cross-tabulation. Five churches answered “yes” when asked if they have planted churches since their succession. Those five churches also noted that, prior to succession, they

pass since the survey was completed, other churches in the survey might have begun planting churches or implementing plans to plant churches. However, this finding demonstrates that the churches in the study continued their church-planting trajectory post-succession. Thus, a church's views and participation in church multiplication prior to succession could well continue post-succession.

This implication, combined with the implication about large structures needing more assistance and the implication about organizational stability, might reveal why multiplication continues after succession. Making significant changes in multisite is difficult—the organizations are large, the authority is partially distributed amongst campuses, and organizational inertia is hard to overcome. Whatever significant activities a multisite church is engaged with (or not engaged with) prior to succession will likely remain (or still be absent) post-succession. A new leader, or a new team of leaders, will have a difficult time changing the core functions and identity of a church culture if the groundwork has not been laid by the first generation of leaders.<sup>20</sup>

### **Campus Futures Are Not Set in Stone**

Following the observation about multiplication, though, comes a question about the future of multisite campuses. Is being a *multisite* church part of the core identity of the organization and, thus, unchangeable? Are the campuses and their futures off-limits? The data from both phases appear to say, “Not entirely.” Table 42 displayed that, of the churches studied, 11 have the same number of campuses as they did pre-succession, 9 added campuses, 2 closed down campuses, and 3 spun campuses off into autonomous

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“directly sponsored church-planting by sending leaders and money to start new churches” (Q15).

<sup>20</sup>Practice 9.04 from table 58 shows a similar perspective. This practice encourages multisite churches to “[address] internal/staffing issues prior to succession.” What does or does not happen prior to succession will be a strong indicator of what the second generation of leadership will be working with.

churches.<sup>21</sup> Further strengthening this argument is practice 9.09 from round 3 (see table 58). Experts found with 90 percent consensus that it was important for multisite churches to “[determine] if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.” Key in that practice is the possibility that multisite will change, or at least look different, after succession.

Looking at this data, along with other research on multisite churches, strengthens the argument that multisite is a temporary strategy to fulfilling the Great Commission, but multisite is not an ongoing strategy. Two of Brian Frye’s predictions in his dissertation on multisite were that “the multi-siting process will become the first step in church planting strategies,” and “the multi-site church process will create more (not fewer) churches.”<sup>22</sup> This dissertation already mentioned The Village Church as an example of this evolution, and another example is Houston’s First Baptist Church. At the time of this writing, Houston’s First Baptist has five campuses throughout the greater Houston area, and they launched their multisite strategy with a long-term goal of autonomous churches.<sup>23</sup> Lead pastor succession does not demand that multisite churches abandon their campus strategy, but it should encourage them to evaluate it.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Churches were able to select more than one option, thus the reason those numbers do not add up to 21.

<sup>22</sup>Brian Nathaniel Frye, “The Multi-Site Church Phenomenon in North America: 1950-2010” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 310-12.

<sup>23</sup>Stephen Smith, “‘The Long Game’: The Question Multisite Churches Must Answer Immediately,” accessed January 5, 2018, <https://newchurches.com/blogs/the-long-game-the-question-multisite-churches-must-answer-immediately/>. During snowball sampling, I interacted with a handful of churches who communicated with me that they were using multisite as a church-planting strategy.

<sup>24</sup>Edwards’ research strengthens this thought. Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics,” 198, found that, while most campus pastors are content in their current role, “more than half” of them had a long-term desire to serve as senior pastor. Succession provides a natural opportunity to evaluate campus health, campus strategy, and campus pastor preparedness for autonomy.

## **Clear Communication Makes the Process Much Smoother**

When asked about lessons learned from succession, communication strategies and processes were a common theme. Positively, and in response to RQ4, several churches believed their communication plans were a strength of their process. For example, one respondent noted the “communication between Gen 1 and Gen 2 as well as to staff, leaders, and congregants” as a part of the process they would keep.<sup>25</sup> Another noted, “There was great communication with the congregation.” A third responded in concert, writing, “The [regular] meetings with people in the church (8-10 at a time) to explain the transition were good.” Conversely, some respondents found their processes were under-communicated.<sup>26</sup> One respondent noted that there needed to be “more verbal, public support from Gen 1 pastor of Gen 2 pastor.” Another mentioned the need to “keep the staff more informed during the process.”

These comments helped form some of the data requested in phase 2. In fact, of the top 37 practices that gained 100 percent consensus from round 3, 9 of the practices focus on how the church or the pastors communicate before, during, or after succession—both corporately and interpersonally.<sup>27</sup> Consistent, trustworthy, regular, clear, and honest (yet celebratory) communication in both public and private settings shows up as invaluable to a healthy succession process.

Another aspect of communication evident in this study as important was how the churches celebrated and honored the pastors and the succession. Celebration is an important part of communication because it helps set a tone and expectation for the church. For example, practice 5.02 (see table 61) mentions the need for Gen 1 pastors to continue

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<sup>25</sup>See table 45 for these responses.

<sup>26</sup>See table 46 for these responses.

<sup>27</sup>Many of the practices emphasize communication in some fashion (preaching, staff meetings, interaction with the board, etc.). However, the practices in table 61 have specific value in how the succession process is understood by the congregation and staff, undergone by the leaders, and remembered by the church.



to support the work of the church in both public and private settings. Further, Gen 2 pastors are encouraged in practice 8.02 (see table 61) to look for opportunities to praise the work of the Gen 1 pastor. Practice 8.01 (see table 57) encourages Gen 2 pastors to “[ensure] the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.” Along with these statements come some of the responses in table 45. One respondent spoke positively about his goal to “celebrate the new pastor and ministry of the retiring pastor.” Another wrote, “We did a great job of celebrating the ministry of the Gen 1 Pastor and also the passing of leadership to the Gen 2 Pastor with congregational and community celebrations.”<sup>28</sup>

Table 61. Full consensus communication practices from round 3

Top 37 Number	Round 3 Number	Category	Practice
12	4.05	Gen 1	Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.
15	5.02	Gen 1	Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.
27	8.02	Gen 2	Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.
32	9.08	Org	Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.
33	10.03	Org	Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.
34	11.01	Org	Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.
35	11.04	Org	Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.
36	11.05	Org	Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.
37	11.06	Org	Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.

<sup>28</sup>For more information on the value of celebration in succession, see Jay Passavant, *Seamless Succession: Simplifying Church Leadership Transitions* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2015), 73-83.

While this need for clear communication appears apparent, the data shows that many succession processes would have been aided by clearer communication in at least one—if not many—areas. Succession has many more dynamics than just one pastor leaving and another coming on. The Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors, their families, the board, the staff (both as a whole and at their respective campuses), the congregants, and the community are all a part of the succession process. Thorough processes recognize this dynamic and plan accordingly. Not one church in the study shared that it felt as if it over-communicated during succession; the churches either saw their communication strategy as a strength in their process or a weakness because of a *lack* of clarity.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Best Succession Processes Leverage a Team**

While there is often one primary name associated with succession—names like Tim Keller, Bob Russell, John Piper, Bill Hybels, Tom Mullins, or Jay Passavant—healthy succession in this study never appeared as a solo endeavor.<sup>30</sup> Even with the Gen 1 pastor serving as the leader of the succession process, the process regularly involved an entire team of people to ensure success. For example, one church used “a subset of [the] Elder’s Council (governing body) [to] serve as a transition team” (see table 45). Another mentioned, regarding the Gen 2 pastor, that he “made tough decisions and pulled a good

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<sup>29</sup>Round 1 of the Delphi provided an opportunity for open-ended responses that were then formed into practices. Some of the open-ended responses about communication resonate strongly with this theme. For example, when asked about how to keep the staff informed during succession, one panelist wrote, “Communication to all staff is key. Communicate in many different forms and styles. Communicate at staff meetings, by email, to departmental teams. We found that you cannot over communicate about what the staff feel will be a huge change for them.” When it came to keeping the congregation informed, another panelist echoed this idea, writing,

Create a communicate plan and stick to it. Have open forums for the congregation to ask questions. Use all mediums to communicate—from the stage, written, online, video, etc. Involve the congregation in the selection process—give those people mechanisms for communicating to the rest of the congregation. The more “engaged” the congregation feels in the process, the more likely they will accept the Gen 2 leader.

<sup>30</sup>This team approach was clearly lacking when W. A. Criswell tried to handle his succession from First Baptist Church in Dallas. See Joel Gregory, *Too Great a Temptation: The Seductive Power of America’s Super Church* (Fort Worth: The Summit Group, 1994).

team around him.” Another spoke positively about his church’s utilization of a “diverse selection team” and yet another said that their “team rallied to help make [succession] happen.” A final church mentioned that the “elder board ran the process and was very engaged.”

Two Gen 1 pastor practices from phase 2 also speak to the value of a team approach to succession (see table 56). First, practice 2.04 (with 80 percent consensus) speaks to how Gen 1 pastors can begin preparing for succession by “strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities.” This team approach gets a congregation used to hearing from multiple leaders instead of only one main leader. In writing about his own succession, Jay Passavant realized just how many churches depend on a singular voice and concluded, “I was not doing justice to my church family by being its primary—sometimes only—voice of teaching.”<sup>31</sup> In response, Passavant established a teaching team where “each campus pastor was given a regular opportunity to preach so that the senior pastor’s voice became part of a preaching team of multiple voices.”<sup>32</sup> A second practice from phase 2 was about the succession plan itself—practice 3.02 (with 90 percent consensus)—which encourages pastors to “[create] and [work] with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan in process.” This team formation was another part of North Way’s process. Passavant explains, “We believed that an entirely new group of people was needed for such a major event in the life of our church.”<sup>33</sup> Instead of letting their elder board run the process, the church believed that a much more diverse group of leaders from the church should exist.

Though Gen 1 pastors (or potentially the Gen 2 pastors) will likely be seen as the crux of any succession event, good succession never focuses upon a singular person.

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<sup>31</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 37.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. North Way still used video during the succession, but the teaching approach started to change the congregation’s expectation about from whom they could expect to hear.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 26.

Rather, the churches in phase 1 and the experts in phase 2 recognize the value of a team. These churches and leaders realize that approaching an event as important (and sensitive) as succession requires numerous voices to provide the best opportunity for success.

### **Clear Succession Strategies Strengthen the Process**

This chapter previously discussed how clear communication aids the process. In the same way, clearly-established strategies for succession aided the process for all churches involved. Three aspects of the study demonstrate the value of clear plans: (1) how the churches and leaders spoke about the need for clear plans, (2) how properly-defined relationships are needed between staff and campuses, and (3) how Gen 1 pastors were provided for financially.

**Clear succession plans.** While the churches in phase 1 all had some type of timeline and plan, those timelines and plans were not always clear at the beginning of the process—some churches found their timelines the right length and plans strong, while others found their timelines too long and plans unclear. Positively, one church praised the “intentionality” of their process (see table 45). Year 1 focused on the “vision and mission” of the church. Year 2 focused on the “pastor search.” Year 3 focused on “[celebrating the] new pastor and ministry of [the] retiring pastor.” A second church spoke of “not compromising” as one of its succession strengths. While unable to follow up on exactly what that respondent meant by “not compromising,” a possible interpretation is that the church stuck to its plans. A third church simply mentioned “a plan was in place” as being a positive part of their succession. A Gen 1 practice that affirms these thoughts is 4.01, stating, “Sticking to the succession plan and timeline” as a valuable part of how a Gen 1 pastor goes through succession. Regarding internal succession, practice 4.04 speaks of the need to create a “multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s)” (see table 56). In all of these plans, *clarity* remains a key factor of their proper execution.

Contrasting these statements and practices are those about what a church would do differently if able (see table 46). One church mentioned needing a “shorter timeframe” and to “[define] roles more clearly.” A second church, realizing its need for clarity, wrote, “We would have a full succession process in place prior to any need for a succession plan.” This statement likely means that the succession plan would be understood *before* the succession commenced. Yet another wrote of a “quicker transition time” needed in its process. A fourth church wrote that “the length of time of the overlap” between leaders “felt a little long.” These observations show that the clearer the plan was from start to finish—and the more committed its leaders were to the process—the more helpful the plans were to succession.

**Clearly defined relationships.** One of the most important parts of the succession plan has to do with relationships between staff, the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors, and the campuses themselves. Multiple churches pointed to this as either a strength or weakness in their process, and the best practices in phase 2 provided further evidence of the value for clear relationships.

First, several churches spoke positively about the clarity of the staff relationships established in their succession process. For example, one church mentioned that a “deep relationship developed before the transfer of authority” between pastors (see table 45). Another praised the “clear timeline, expectations, and communication between Gen 1 and Gen 2 as well as to staff, leaders, and congregants.” At the same time, a number of churches needed more relationship clarity in their processes. As stated earlier, one church wished it would have “defined roles more clearly” between pastors. Another respondent shared this sentiment, writing of their church’s need to “clarify roles between Gen 1 and Gen 2 staffers.” A third church said they would consider clarifying how the Gen 1 pastor would stay involved post-succession (see table 46).

Phase 2’s practices strengthen the need for churches to address staff relationships and organizational clarity. First, a Gen 1 pastor’s relationship to the church

post-succession is key. Practice 2.01 from round 3 states that Gen 1 pastors need “a clear plan on how they will/won’t engage with the church after succession” (see table 56). Practice 4.02 also speaks about giving space post-succession to let Gen 2 pastors “lead freely.” Interestingly, the practices also demonstrate the need to bring organizational clarity during the process. Experts found 100 percent consensus on practice 9.01, stating that multisite churches needed to “[develop] clear lines of authority within and between campuses” to help prepare the church for succession.<sup>34</sup> Practice 9.04 also met 100 percent consensus, with multisite churches encouraged to “address internal/staffing issues prior to succession.” Addressing these issues is another way of creating organizational clarity.

Multisite succession demands that churches create clarity in their staff, their leaders, and their organization. Where clarity is lacking, confusion abounds. When looking at how churches viewed their processes and certain best practices, one sees that the clearer the staff and pastor relationships are established and kept, the better the succession process. This need for clarity continues in the relationship in and between campuses as well. When people and campuses know their roles before, during, and after succession, then the church is able to focus upon what is most necessary.

**Established financial considerations.** One clarifying conversation that can be incredibly difficult to have is a conversation about finances. Vanderbloemen and Bird encourage pastors going through succession to get a clear picture of their financial future: “Far too many pastors face retirement with no way to fund it.”<sup>35</sup> From the organizational perspective, Russell writes, “The organization should begin early to develop a generous compensation package.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>See table 58 for organizational practices.

<sup>35</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 45.

<sup>36</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 63.

An unexpected finding in this study was the number of churches that provided some type of retirement compensation to the Gen 1 pastor—and just how important that package was. Table 32 mapped out the different types of financial arrangements churches had with the Gen 1 pastor. Interestingly, 16 churches provided some type of compensation to the Gen 1 pastor. Multisite churches in this study provided in various ways for the Gen 1 pastor, but most churches made sizeable one-time or ongoing commitments to the Gen 1 pastor’s financial future. One respondent spoke positively that his church “insured the financial stability of the Gen 1 Pastor through open dialogue and clear agreement prior to the succession” (see table 45).

Two practices in phase 2 speak directly to this need. From the Gen 1 perspective, practice 2.03 states Gen 1 pastors need to “[determine] their personal financial needs post-succession and [communicate] them to the appropriate leadership” (see table 56). The same practice exists from an organizational perspective. As part of preparing organizationally for succession, practice 9.05 encourages multisite churches to “[address] early in the process any financial components to the succession.” While financial conversations can be difficult, the more clearly a Gen 1 pastor and a church can talk about these needs, the more smoothly the process can go.

From clarity of the succession plan to clarity in relationships to clarity in finances, the churches and leaders in this study stated time and time again that clarity throughout the succession process was essential. Many might assume these areas of clarity would already exist in a church; however, many should learn from some of the statements in tables 45 and 46 (as well as many of the practices). Be it a lack of clarity in timeline or a lack of clarity in staff roles or a lack of clarity within the organization itself, a succession process cannot be too clear.

## Clear Similarities Exist between Single Site and Multisite Succession

The findings from phase 2 have been shared throughout this chapter. However, one implication came about as a direct result of the Delphi process. A thought that inspired this study was whether succession in multisite was unique. In other words, did aspects of multisite itself cause succession to flow differently—and to what degree did they influence the succession process? After three rounds of interaction with church leaders and consultants in the multisite movement, many practices could also apply to single-site succession.<sup>37</sup>

After looking at each of the 76 practices from phase 2, only 7 of the 76 practices relate directly to a church being multisite. The remaining practices might be seen through the lens of multisite but could likely apply similarly to single-site churches. Table 62 shows the practices that specifically focused on a church having more than one campus.

Table 62. Practices specifically tied to multisite churches

Round 3 Number	Category	Practice
6.02	Gen 2	Building relationships with people at all campuses.
9.01	Org	Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.
9.07	Org	Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.
9.09	Org	Determining if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.
9.10	Org	Ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.
10.06	Org	Empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.
11.04	Org	Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.

<sup>37</sup>Neal Ledbetter, studying best practices of online undergraduate spiritual formation, found something similar. It could be that best practices in a specific area reflect the best practices for the larger field. See Neal Brian Ledbetter, “Best Practices of Online Undergraduate Spiritual Formation at Select Institutions of Christian Higher Education: A Delphi Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 153.



As expected, the bulk of these multisite-specific practices focus on the organization. The categorization makes sense, since the unique aspect of multisite is not its people, necessarily, but its structure. These practices also mirrored (and added to) research that has come before. For example, in his work on succession, Russell shared seven observations about succession. With each observation, there are similar (at times nearly identical) practices discovered from phase 2 of this research.

Table 63. Russell’s observations combined with delphi practices

Russell Observation <sup>38</sup>	Round 3 Number	Category	Practice
“God can bless a variety of transitions, but an intentional plan has the best chance for success.”	2.01	Gen 1	Having a clear plan on how they will/won’t engage with the church after succession.
	3.01	Gen 1	Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.
	3.02	Gen 1	Creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.
	4.01	Gen 1	Sticking to the succession plan and timeline.
	4.04	Gen 1	If internal succession, creating a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s).
“The character of the persons involved in the transition is much more important than the timing or the strategy”	2.05	Gen 1	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.
	2.07	Gen 1	Giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.
	6.03	Gen 2	Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.
	6.05	Gen 2	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.
	6.06	Gen 2	Focusing on spiritual disciplines.
	6.07	Gen 2	Giving attention to their family relationships.
	6.08	Gen 2	Growing in humility.

<sup>38</sup>The categories for Russell’s observations come from *Transition Plan*, 57-67.

Table 63 continued

“Two years of mentoring and transitioning seems an adequate amount of time.”	1.02	Gen 1	At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).
	4.06	Gen 1	If internal succession, walking closely with the Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.
“The departing leader should be the initiator of the transition plan, and not the organization.”	11.05	Org	Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.
“The organization should begin early to develop a generous compensation package.”	2.03	Gen 1	Determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.
	9.05	Org	Addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.
“The successor should share the same values, but not necessarily the same leadership style or temperament.”	4.02	Gen 1	Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.
	5.04	Gen 1	If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.
	6.01	Gen 2	Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.
	7.02	Gen 2	Building trust with the church. <sup>39</sup>
“A wise successor will practice patience and restraint in implementing changes.”	7.08	Gen 2	Minimizing large organizational changes.

The fact that so much similarity exists does not minimize the findings. In phase 2, experts were asked to think specifically about multisite when they answered their questions. Crossover between single site and multisite exists at a higher degree than originally expected, but each succession needs to take into account its unique context. Thus, all practices need to be uniquely applied to either a multisite or single-site setting.

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<sup>39</sup>The practices that aligned with Russell’s comments about shared values are the weakest. It is not to say that these practices did not exist. Rather, the research uncovered a large amount of internal successions along with a multi-year season on mentoring. This intimates that the need to share values is a part of many of the successions studied. The practices shared in table 63 highlight the second aspect of Russell’s statement—which focus on the ability for Gen 2 pastors to lead in a way they see appropriate.

## Research Applications

Closely tied to any implication for research are the research applications—and the above implications clearly moves church leaders toward application. Application is a natural extension of this project in part because phase 2 is entirely made up of practices for multisite leadership. Phase 1, while not asking for best practices, produced phenomenological data that represent the churches’ practices (whether or not they were positive, or best, was not uncovered in phase 1). With all the data combined, the following applications are suggested for Gen 1 pastors, Gen 2 pastors, and multisite church leaders.<sup>40</sup>

### Applications for Gen 1 Pastors

Vanderbloemen and Bird open their book with a simple and profound statement: “Every pastor is an interim pastor.”<sup>41</sup> This statement, while true, is still difficult to live out. Gen 1 pastors in this study put in decades of ministry work,<sup>42</sup> and, at times, were also the founding pastors of their church<sup>43</sup> and had to be the first to hand off the reins to a new generation of leadership. What does this study offer for Gen 1 pastors? An evaluation of the data shows four broad applications for Gen 1 pastors: (1) making succession easy to discuss, (2) developing staff, (3) remembering their identity, (4) knowing what is next.

**Make succession easy to discuss—and discuss it early.** Gen 1 pastors are not the only people who make succession possible, but they have the bulk of the positional power to make the process smooth. Weese and Crabtree write, “A healthy pastoral

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<sup>40</sup>These three categories are the same categories as used in phase 2, as these three areas of church life appeared most influenced by succession from a leadership perspective. Thus, in this section, I combine the implication into the following applications—seen through the grid of the type of leader involved in succession.

<sup>41</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 9.

<sup>42</sup>See table 16 for the tenure of these pastors. The majority of Gen 1 pastors in the study had put in between 20 and 30 years at their church as the Gen 1 pastor.

<sup>43</sup>Nine out of 21 churches in the study included a Gen 1 pastor who was also the founding pastor of the church.

transition is one that enables a church to move forward into the next phase of its external and internal development with a new leader” while minimizing unnecessary loss during that change.<sup>44</sup> This type of healthy transition cannot happen without the Gen 1 pastor committed and on board with the process.

Question 22 of phase 1 asked who communicated the succession plan to the congregation. The Gen 1 pastor communicated the plan in 13 of the 21 instances (see table 24).<sup>45</sup> However, the public communication of succession is only one of many necessary conversations during succession. Practice 1.04, which gained 100 percent consensus from panelists in phase 2, states that “committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required” is a valuable practice for the Gen 1 pastor. This practice means that Gen 1 pastors need to be talking with others about succession upwards of five to ten years prior to any actual succession implementation.<sup>46</sup>

Question 3 from round 3 asked about the people or groups with whom Gen 1 pastors should interact to develop their succession plan (see table 56). Responses that gained consensus included the board and governing authorities, a special transition team, the Gen 1 pastor’s spouse, and other pastors who have gone through succession. These types of conversations are years in the making and should be regular aspects of the Gen 1 pastor’s interactions with others. Further, practice 11.08 encourages churches to utilize avenues such as sermons to plant seeds of succession (see table 58). For Gen 1 pastors, the more regularly succession is discussed, the easier the process will be for all parties

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<sup>44</sup>Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 41.

<sup>45</sup>In three other instances, the Gen 1 pastor communicated the plan along with a member (or members) of the governing board.

<sup>46</sup>Considering that succession should be discussed a minimum of 3-5 years before it takes place (see practice 1.02 from round 3), Gen 1 pastors need to start the conversations much earlier than their expected retirement. A corollary practice comes when asked how the Gen 1 pastor can personally prepare. Practice 2.02 exhorts Gen 1 pastors to “[have] early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.”

involved. Succession is not something to fear but a natural part of personal and organizational maturation. The worst succession stories often involve a pastor who was unable to let go, and, as Vanderbloemen and Bird write, “No one wins when transitions don’t go well.”<sup>47</sup> Gen 1 pastors can help the transition go well by starting the succession conversation, embracing the succession conversation, and starting the succession conversation early. While succession is a potentially uncomfortable topic that may foster insecurity, Gen 1 pastors can lead the way in making the discussion natural and healthy.

**Always develop staff.** The need for Gen 1 pastors to develop their staffs cannot be overstated. The high percentage of internal successions in these churches means that, in most instances studied, the successor was already in the staff meeting. The question for Gen 1 pastors, then, is, what are you doing to develop the staff that you have to become the leaders of the church you will leave? J. D. Greear challenges the common view of numerical success, writing, “Any ministry’s success should be judged, not by size, but by how well it raises up disciples who raise up more disciples.”<sup>48</sup> Greear’s focus in this statement is on developing leaders to send out into ministry to train others (2 Tim 2:2). Not all pastors on a multisite church staff will serve as lead pastors—nor should they. However, Gen 1 pastors should have the right perspective on their impermanence and should regularly develop their staff so those staff members can become the best possible leaders in the church.

Practice 1.03 encourages Gen 1 pastors to consider succession when “a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists” (see table 56). This practice can be interpreted as a Gen 1 pastor waking up one day to find a strong crop of new leaders at the church. That belief, however, is not accurate. The Gen 1 pastor’s development of staff (not to mention the

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<sup>47</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 26.

<sup>48</sup>J. D. Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 141.

intentional mentoring of the Gen 2 pastor) is how that strong group of leaders exists. For help understanding what is necessary for developing leaders, Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck write about “leadership development imperatives.”<sup>49</sup> They find that there are three necessary activities for leader development: giving leaders the right (1) knowledge, (2) experiences, and (3) coaching.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, Gen 1 pastors need to ensure their staffs always have healthy opportunities to participate in developing into future leaders—and then give those leaders the feedback necessary to see them grow. This type of development might mean Gen 1 pastors let other ministry staff shadow them on pastoral visits, attend conferences with them, preach for them, lead staff meetings in their absence, or perform myriad other leadership tasks.<sup>51</sup> The more the Gen 1 pastor shares leadership with the church staff and focuses on their development, the more is done to prepare potential successors.

**Focus on identity.** “Be clear about [your] identity. (I am not what I do.)” One of the panelists shared this thought when asked how Gen 1 pastors can personally prepare for succession. Another panelist wrote, “Being ready to release and then move onto a new assignment from the Lord will create a huge identity question.” These statements led to practice 2.05 in table 56: “Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.” Another (practice 2.07) speaks of “giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.” These practices make up only two of the 76, but they are core to the Gen 1 pastor’s vitality.

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<sup>49</sup>Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 171.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 171-76.

<sup>51</sup>In his research on authority and autonomy in multisite, Edwards, “Leadership Structures and Dynamics,” 214-16, encourages senior pastors to give campus pastors more opportunities to preach and, at times, even choose their own texts.

Identity in Christ might seem like a given for pastoral leadership. Pastors spend decades of their lives helping people better understand the Scriptures. However, finding value in Christ rather than value in the role of pastor can be incredibly difficult. The size of the churches surveyed, their budgets, their influence, and the esteem many of these pastors receive can make the most dedicated pastor slip into feelings of pride and/or perceived value only because of their function within the church.<sup>52</sup> This feeling, however, should be combatted.

How does a pastor stay grounded in such an environment? The simple answer is to continue to cultivate their relationship with Christ and not get caught up in church growth and ministry successes.<sup>53</sup> Engaging in regular spiritual disciplines,<sup>54</sup> attending to family relationships,<sup>55</sup> and living accountably to others within the church will help nurture a pastor's soul and serve as a constant reminder that identity will always precede a momentary role in the church.

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<sup>52</sup>Marshall Goldsmith talks about this identity struggle from a secular perspective in his work on CEO succession. Goldsmith writes, "While you, as a CEO, have to face an enormous amount of work, pressure, and grief, let's be honest here—the job does come with a few pretty nice benefits!" *Succession: Are You Ready?* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2009), 18. Goldsmith goes on to talk about the many areas of corporate leadership to which a CEO can become attached. *Ibid.*, 18-25.

<sup>53</sup>One case of ministry strategy and success becoming too much of a focus involves NewSpring church and pastor Perry Noble. NewSpring is a large multisite church and Noble was its founding pastor. However, the elders of NewSpring dismissed Noble in July 2016, because of an over-dependence upon alcohol. In Noble's words, "What we've seen the Lord do over the past 16 years has been a modern day miracle. However, in my obsession to do everything possible to reach 100,000 and beyond—it has come at a personal cost in my own life and created a strain on my marriage." Perry Noble, "Perry Noble Statement," accessed January 4, 2017, <http://ns.downloads.s3.amazonaws.com/newspring/editorial/Perry%20Noble%20Statement.pdf>. Large churches can place enormous pressure on their pastors, and continual character formation is a key way of keeping the right focus.

<sup>54</sup>For examples, see Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperOne, 1990).

<sup>55</sup>Russell notes how his succession actually made life difficult for his wife. Russell speaks of but a few regrets about his succession, but regarding his wife, he writes, "One other change I would have made was to be more understanding of my wife's feelings about the approaching transition." Russell, *Transition Plan*, 36.

**Know what is next.** Finally, part of planning succession for Gen 1 pastors clearly involves how Gen 1 pastors will serve after succession. In fact, this practice might be one of the most important facets of succession. The churches in this study spoke numerous times about how the clarity of roles between the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastor either helped or hindered the succession process (see tables 45, 46). Further, 5 of the Gen 1 best practices from round 3 related to how Gen 1 pastors operated after succession. Table 64 lists the practices, as well as expert consensus.

Table 64. Gen 1 practices focusing beyond transfer of leadership

Round 3 Number	Practice	Percent in Agreement
2.01	Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.	100.00%
5.01	Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.	100.00%
5.03	If remaining at the church after succession, focusing on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.	80.00%
5.04	If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.	90.00%
5.05	Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.	100.00%

Gen 1 pastors should regularly think about what they will be doing after they stop serving their church. Different leaders have different needs, gifts, and desires post-succession. However, having the post-succession plan clear *prior* to the leadership handoff helps all parties involved. Conversely, pastors who do not have a clear plan often create confusion for the church and the new leadership. The churches in this study had many Gen 1 pastors remaining at the church after succession (either immediately after succession or after leaving for a set period) (see tables 30, 31). Whether or not a pastor stays is up to the church, the pastor, and what the succession plan dictates, but *clarity* in the plan post-succession is key. When discussing whether pastors should remain at the church after succession, Vanderbloemen and Bird do not encourage one or the other but simply



encourage pastors to make it clear. “If you decide to stick around,” they write, “having clearly defined guidelines for your role, written and signed by you and the board, will help memorialize the intent of your role in years to come.”<sup>56</sup> Knowing the post-succession plans of the Gen 1 pastor also helps the congregation know how to pray, how to celebrate, and how to encourage the future ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.

### **Applications for Gen 2 Pastors**

While Gen 1 pastors give attention to their new ministry endeavors, Gen 2 pastors begin leading a church in a brand-new capacity. All the training and mentoring in the world gets put to the test once new leadership begins. One helpful aspect of this research was the interaction and voice that it gave to Gen 2 pastors. Gen 2 pastors contributed to both phases of the study and offered important feedback and perspective to succession and how it should be approached. Four applications of the research stand out as important for Gen 2 pastors: (1) giving primary attention to their character, (2) preparing now for being the leader they want to be, (3) tempering their ambitions, (4) speaking well about the church they inherited.

**Develop character first.** Character development is of utmost important for any pastor. Just as Gen 1 pastors need to focus on their identity in Christ over their function as a pastor, Gen 2 pastors need to give primary attention to their own character. It is no mistake that the primary qualifications for elders in the New Testament are character-based (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Phase 1’s emphasis on the succession phenomenon did not provide ample opportunities to evaluate character. However, character-based practices showed up numerous times regarding Gen 2 pastors during phase 2.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 70.

<sup>57</sup>The previous section on Gen 1 practices discussed the necessity of character/identity for Gen 1 pastors. While similarities exist in both Gen 1 and Gen 2 practices, five of the eight practices regarding personal preparation of Gen 2 pastors (round 3 Q6) focused on character development.

Table 65. Character-based practices for Gen 2 pastors

Practice Number	Practice	Percent in Agreement
6.03	Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.	90.00%
6.05	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	100.00%
6.06	Focusing on spiritual disciplines.	100.00%
6.07	Giving attention to their family relationships.	100.00%
6.08	Growing in humility.	80.00%

Each of the practices in table 65 is either (1) directly related to character development or (2) evidence of growing godly character. While young pastors often want to learn skills about pastoral leadership, nothing replaces character. Gen 2 pastors would be wise to make character their focus while letting skill-based practices take a secondary emphasis in their development.<sup>58</sup>

**Prepare now for the future.** With the average age difference between Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors in this study being 21 years, and the average age of Gen 2 pastors being 42 (see table 28), Gen 1 pastors are often looking at pastors in their mid-to-late 30s to succeed them. While there might only be one Gen 2 pastor for any church, aspiring Gen 2 pastors likely exist at many churches. It takes a unique leader to be thinking about the type of leader he wants to be ten to twenty years in the future. Thus, dovetailing with the priority of character comes the need for Gen 2 pastors to start developing as future senior leaders long before they might actually step into such a role.

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<sup>58</sup>Strength of character is a theme developed throughout pastoral research. For an example, see Hudson’s research on church revitalization. Hudson sought to build a competency model for church revitalization. In doing so, he interacted with multiple experts in the field and found that “the expert-practitioner ratings of competencies for church revitalization . . . prioritized character competencies over knowledge and skills.” Joseph Stephen Hudson, “A Competency Model for Church Revitalization in Southern Baptist Convention Churches: A Mixed Methods Study” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 157. Aubrey Malphurs writes, “Godly character is the essential ingredient that qualifies Christians to lead others.” Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 19.

In discussing his own pastorate as a 31-year-old, William Vanderbloemen shares that he was given this advice from an older leader: “Smart young leaders spend their early years creating options for their later years.”<sup>59</sup> As that idea relates to this study, future Gen 2 pastors (be they aspiring ones or ones who have already been selected as successors) should seek varied opportunities to develop personally, educationally, and professionally. Such work also helps develop what they might be after their tenure as Gen 2 pastor ends. Further, and connected to the Gen 1 applications, wise Gen 1 pastors should create varied opportunities for potential Gen 2 pastors to participate in, and Gen 2 pastors should take the opportunities provided to them for development. Specific nuances of leading in their individual church will often present themselves through a period of mentoring with the Gen 1 pastor, but future Gen 2 pastors can *currently* develop many skills that would aid them in any ministry context.

**Temper ambition.** Desiring senior leadership in and of itself is morally neutral, but pride can easily creep into any Gen 2 leader’s ambitions. Gen 2 pastors can fall prey to thinking they have the best answers and strategies for a new season of ministry. However, this study revealed the value of stability. Thus, Gen 2 pastors need not focus on what can be changed but focus instead on developing what currently exists at their church. While Gen 2 leaders are provided opportunities to change aspects of the church they inherited,<sup>60</sup> Gen 2 pastors are encouraged to change things at a slower rate than they may desire.

Practice 7.08 states that it is valuable for Gen 2 pastors to minimize changes in the first twelve months (see table 57). This practice developed from panelist statements such as, “Resist the temptation to make sweeping changes too fast,” and “Total focus

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<sup>59</sup>Todd Adkins, “Interview with William Vanderbloemen, 5 Leadership Questions,” podcast audio, July 28, 2017, <http://www.lifeway.com/leadership/2017/07/28/5lq-episode-185-william-vanderbloemen/>. See also *Next*, 178.

<sup>60</sup>See results of RQ3 in tables 40 through 43.

should be on building relationships with the staff, the leaders and the congregation. There should be absolutely no changes made during this time frame.”<sup>61</sup> Russell explains why this focus on relationships and little structural change is so important:

A change of ministers is a huge transition for people and a wise successor needs to be patient and give the congregation a year or two before implementing dramatic change. That is difficult to do because the new preacher may be totally convinced that dramatic change is necessary and will benefit the congregation in the long run. But too much change too fast disorients people and is usually counterproductive.<sup>62</sup>

Russell’s argument is that Gen 2 pastors create better gains by changing less within the church—especially early in their tenures. Demonstrating restraint in a desire to change—even if the church has an internal succession—honors the Gen 1 pastor and develops trust with the church. If the Gen 2 pastor has a tenure remotely similar to the Gen 1 pastors in this study (20+ years), then many opportunities to bring change will present themselves. Exercising discretion will provide better opportunities to change in the future.

**Speak well and often about what was inherited.** Rather than bring significant changes early in the role, a better route would be to regularly praise the work of the church and the ministry of the Gen 1 pastor. Reviewing the open-ended responses from round 1 question 8 of the Delphi revealed numerous responses that spoke to the need for Gen 2 pastors to speak well of the church that was inherited. For example, one panelist wrote, “The Gen 2 pastor must first, in his/her mind and heart, establish and get clear on the many ways that God has blessed the work of the Gen 1 pastor. This inner-understanding is the first key and may take this new leader(s) time to fully grasp.” Another panelist

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<sup>61</sup>Four practices in table 60 (the Top 16 practices that gained 100 percent consensus in rounds 2 and 3) similarly reflect the former part of this panelist’s statement. Regarding the Gen 2 pastor’s focus in the first twelve months, practice 6.02 challenges pastors to build relationships “with all people at all campuses,” practice 7.01 tells Gen 2 pastors to focus on “developing strong relationships at every level of the church,” and practice 6.01 says Gen 2 pastors should “learn the nuances of leading their specific church.” All of these lead to practice 7.02, which states that Gen 2 pastors should give appropriate time “building trust with the church.”

<sup>62</sup>Russell, *Transition Plan*, 68.

wrote that Gen 2 pastors can honor Gen 1 pastors by “always speaking supportive speech of him/her” and “continually praying and investing in the future of the gen 1 pastor.”<sup>63</sup>

Yet another writes,

The Gen 2 pastor should bring attention to the past—honoring the season that the Gen 1 pastor served. While I'm sure this is difficult for a catalytic leader who is more focused on moving on with new vision, conscientious and consistent communication publicly not only honors the former pastor, but sets up the new pastor for success.<sup>64</sup>

Still another panelist echoes these sentiments when asked about the personal preparation of the Gen 2 pastor (round 1 question 6): “It's impossible to build a house when you simultaneously chip away at the foundation.”

These statements reflect what was spoken in Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.” The speech of Gen 2 pastors about Gen 1 pastors and their tenures will help or hinder their own tenures. This type of speech does not mean that everything went perfectly during the Gen 1’s tenure.<sup>65</sup> Rather, the Gen 2 pastor resolves to speak well of the previous pastor to honor the work inherited—regardless of what was inherited.

### **Applications for Multisite Church Leaders**

Senior pastor succession in multisite churches has clear applications to Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors. However, a third category of leaders exists—those in significant leadership roles in multisite churches. This category pertains to many people who lead faithfully within multisite churches: Gen 1 pastors, potential Gen 2 pastors, elder or

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<sup>63</sup>Churches and leaders participating in this study were not asked to have a certain ecclesiology or view of gender within the church, nor were they asked to state their positions before participating in the study.

<sup>64</sup>Minor grammatical and syntactical edits have been made to these quotes to make them clearer to readers.

<sup>65</sup>Another response in round 1 question 8 read, “Do nothing but brag and complement [sic] in public, especially in the first 6 months—even if he or she has inherited a mess!”

governance board members, deacons, trustees, key lay leaders, denominational or network leaders, potential multisite consultants, senior staff members, etc. Often, these leaders serve during both pastoral tenures—making their function in succession (though often behind the scenes) invaluable.<sup>66</sup> These leaders in churches undergoing succession play a unique role because they can help ensure the above applications are executed faithfully. Rather than the tip of the succession arrow—which in most instances should be the Gen 1 pastor—these leaders are the feathers that guide the process. The following applications help guide a succession strategy: (1) making succession easy to discuss, (2) knowing the long-term multisite strategy, (3) ensuring development of a holistic succession plan, and (4) helping the Gen 1 pastor do the hard work prior to succession.

**Make succession easy for the Gen 1 pastor to discuss.** The first application in this entire section was for Gen 1 pastors to make succession easy to discuss and to discuss succession early. A large portion of the burden for communicating and planning succession falls on Gen 1 pastors. Such a burden is appropriate. At the same time, the larger church leadership, of which the Gen 1 pastor is but one part, can make succession conversations easy or difficult. Weese and Crabtree discuss five reasons why leaders might fear discussing succession: (1) it might make leaders think a change is imminent, (2) it creates a “lame duck situation in which effective ministry becomes impossible,” (3) it produces “unintended consequences” that are unmanageable for the leader, (4) leaders are under-resourced and, thus, unable to make transition successful, and (5) leaders will not

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<sup>66</sup>In discussing CEO succession, Ciampa and Dotlich mention four people or groups of people who are “major players” in navigating succession: “The board, the CEO, the CHRO [chief human resources officer], and the senior managers.” Dan Ciampa and David L. Dotlich, *Transitions at the Top: What Organizations Must Do to Make Sure New Leaders Succeed* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 11. While church life and corporate life should always be seen as different, Ciampa and Dotlich’s observation is an important one—good high-level leader succession processes understand the unique roles that different constituencies play.

have the support of “peers and colleagues.”<sup>67</sup> It is likely that any Gen 1 pastor will feel a significant amount of loss and anxiety when considering succession.

Multisite church leaders can alleviate this burden by letting their Gen 1 pastors know that discussing succession will be a regular and welcomed part of ministry life. In fact, regularly discussing succession keeps a church’s focus on what is to come—and thus plan appropriately. Specific ways that multisite leaders can help Gen 1 pastors are to (1) ensure Gen 1 pastors that honest conversations about succession will never result in forced exits, (2) at a minimum, make succession-planning discussions a part of every annual evaluation, (3) have a specific committee that exists to talk to Gen 1 pastors confidentially about their future, and (4) lead the way on talking about any financial needs the Gen 1 pastor might have.<sup>68</sup> While many other practical examples exist, the principle is clear: multisite leadership can help make succession an easy topic for Gen 1 pastors to discuss—which only helps the pastor and the church.

**Know the long-term multisite strategy.** An implication of this study was that campus futures are not set in stone. This research posited that, rather than an entrenched part of a church’s identity, the multisite model is a strategy that should be appropriately leveraged for the Great Commission, but never a required strategy. Even after succession, some churches shut down campuses, others started new campuses, and still other churches launched campuses as autonomous churches (see table 42). A related practice was practice 9.09, which states that multisite churches should “[determine] if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.”

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<sup>67</sup>Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 14-15.

<sup>68</sup>Practice 9.05 states that organizational preparation is aided by “addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.”

While every church in this study remained multisite immediately after succession,<sup>69</sup> developing clarity about campus futures becomes important when succession conversations begin. One reason this application falls directly upon the leaders of multisite (versus just the Gen 1 or Gen 2 pastor) is because they are the ones who will be with the church before and after succession and are the most equipped to think beyond the succession in this regard. Leaders should feel free to evaluate their multisite strategy at succession and whether part of it developed based upon the specific gifts of the Gen 1 pastor or other leadership at the church at the time. As an example, chapter 2 discussed the long-term trajectory of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City. As part of a nearly twenty-year strategy, Redeemer committed to develop a multisite model with a specific endpoint in mind that resulted in multiple churches instead of multiple campuses.<sup>70</sup> This endpoint came in the summer of 2017. The type of multisite strategy a church should develop was not a part of this research and depends on the unique mission and vision of the individual church and its local context. However, succession provides a unique opportunity for multisite leaders to ask, “How do we want to pursue multisite after our current pastor(s) leave?”

**Ensure development of a holistic succession plan.** Another application for multisite leaders in particular is to ensure that the Gen 1 pastors (or others developing the plan) create a holistic plan. Table 22 lists the numerous groups involved in developing the succession plan. Those people and groups include the Gen 1 pastor, the governing board, denominational leadership, and the Gen 2 pastor. Table 56, which represents Gen 1 practices from phase 2, states that Gen 1 pastors should interact with people or groups such as their governing board, a special transition team, their spouse, and other pastors

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<sup>69</sup>One church in the study is now no longer multisite. However, at succession, the church was multisite.

<sup>70</sup>Redeemer Presbyterian Church, *A Vision for a Renewed City* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 1998).



that have gone through succession. Leaders at a multisite church are an important part of developing the plan, evaluating the plan, and executing the plan. The research shows several important areas to consider.

First, multisite leaders can help make a plan holistic by working on the timing of the succession. In many instances, Gen 1 pastors will propose a potential timeline for succession that should be up for evaluation. Multisite leaders, and, in this instance, often the board members, are encouraged to collaborate with the development of this plan and the timing therein.<sup>71</sup> The clearer the timing, and the greater the commitment of sticking to the timing, the easier the process will go.

Second, multisite leaders can help ensure that the appropriate staff members are engaged in the succession process. Practice 9.02 states, with 100 percent consensus, that churches should “[take] the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.”<sup>72</sup> Practice 9.06 focuses on “ensuring that the church has a strong staff leadership team in place” and practice 9.10 reveals the need to keep campus pastors “regularly engaged during the succession process.” Further, the value of developing a team (or teams) for succession can be a collaborative work developed by the leadership of the church and the Gen 1 pastor.<sup>73</sup>

Third, multisite leadership can ensure that a clear communication strategy exists in their church. Staff engagement, congregational engagement, leader engagement, Gen 2 candidate engagement, and campus engagement must all be considered. Over-communication of succession—and fostering a spirit of transparency throughout that communication—will help the process. Passavant, known in the church leadership

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<sup>71</sup>See practice 9.03.

<sup>72</sup>Organizational practices for round 3 are found in table 58.

<sup>73</sup>While practice 3.02 (“creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process”) falls underneath Gen 1 pastors, other leaders on the team can be a part of ensuring Gen 1 pastors create and utilize this team.

community for the succession at North Way, candidly shares a story of bad communication:

The entire event took place before the succession process described in these pages was launched. Not quite two years before I knew the succession process should be engaged, we had a staff position come open for a teaching pastor. We brought on to the team a very gifted teacher of the Word with great potential in leadership and casting vision. As the months passed, I could not help but project into the future and see with some extended mentoring and service, that this young man had the raw material from God to possibly become an exceptional senior leader.

However, because the kind of process that I am detailing in this book was not in place, and because North Way had not taken any specific steps to clarify the stream of communication, it wasn't long before the possibility of this individual becoming a candidate had to be taken off the table. What moved this event from simply disappointing to somewhat damaging was the absence of a clear communication process, which allowed many inaccurate stories to begin to undermine the entire experience. . . . I know, first hand, how quickly something positive can become negative in this matter of succession, and this event made it painfully obvious to us that we needed a much more structured and highly interactive communication plan to allow us to undergo a future positive and lasting succession experience.<sup>74</sup>

Different communication strategies exist at each church, but the following strategies should be considered: (1) have a set frequency of providing written updates to staff and congregation; (2) establish a strategy on how to regularly engage leaders and members of the church in varied environments;<sup>75</sup> (3) determine a set frequency for transition updates in their worship services; and (4) determine what communication should be reserved for the Gen 1 pastor exclusively and what communication can be given to other staff members.<sup>76</sup>

A fourth and final way multisite leaders can apply these findings is to ensure that the church finds the best possible successor(s). Clearly, Gen 1 pastors should have latitude to communicate with their leadership the person or persons they think best for the next generation. However, the best succession processes are collaborative. Churches can determine early in the process their approach to finding a successor—internal or external,

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<sup>74</sup>Passavant, *Seamless Succession*, 47.

<sup>75</sup>See practice 11.09 about small group gatherings.

<sup>76</sup>See practice 11.05.

for example—and the way in which they will vet these candidates and find the right one for leadership.

**Help the Gen 1 pastor do the hard work now.** Gen 2 pastors in multisite churches must work with what they have inherited and, thus, multisite leaders need to work to be sure Gen 2 pastors inherit the best possible church environment. One of the regrets listed in table 46 was about wishing the church had brought more clarity to staff roles in the church prior to succession. Practice 9.04 mentions that good organizational preparation includes “addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession” (see table 58). Another practice regarding organizational preparation is practice 9.01, stating that churches should “[develop] clear lines of authority within and between campuses.” Creating clarity is hard work. A temptation might be to leave organizational ambiguity to the Gen 2 pastors to address; however, this temptation is an abdication of strong leadership. No church is perfect, and any succession will raise questions that should be addressed. Multisite church leaders can help develop a stronger succession process by helping Gen 1 pastors identify and address these issues. If not addressed, Gen 2 pastors spend the early (and often crucial) months of their post-succession tenure trying to clean up what was left behind.

### **A Succession Roadmap**

How can one combine the information in this research into a singular strategy for succession? The research herein shows that viewing succession any one way is fallacious—as many strategies exist at churches. However, the principles of this research can be considered by any leader and any church to map out the best process for any individual succession. To help these leaders plan for the inevitable succession, I propose a roadmap in this section.

Rather than direct the specific steps that need to be taken and the moment those steps must occur, the roadmap unfolds through prompts or questions for each type of leader

included in the application—Gen 1 leaders, Gen 2 leaders, and organizational leaders.<sup>77</sup> Further, each leader is given prompts for each stage in the process (which are developed chronologically). The *preparing* stage occurs 7-10 years before the actual succession event and focuses on identity and aspirations. This far out in the process allows for time to have safe (but hopefully regular) conversations about the succession.

Table 66. The preparing stage

Stage	Gen 1 Prompts	Gen 2 Prompts	Org Prompts
Preparing (7-10 years before succession)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Has my leadership at the church kept me so busy that I have neglected my spiritual growth?</li> <li>-How many conversations about my departure have I had with my church leadership?</li> <li>-How can I better train and develop the staff at my church?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What opportunities am I pursuing that will form me into the leader I want to be in 10 years?</li> <li>-How am I addressing areas of my character that are under-developed?</li> <li>-Do friends and family see in me a future senior leader?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Have we had conversations with our Gen 1 pastor about succession?</li> <li>-Are we measuring the right aspects of church growth and health?</li> <li>-How are we addressing areas where we might have drifted from our identity as a church?</li> </ul>

The *planning* stage occurs 3-5 years before succession and focuses on establishing clear plans for succession. At this time, the conversations are at a high level and no plans have been rolled out to the staff or congregation. A pivotal moment that transitions the phase from preparing to planning happens when the key leaders huddle together and ask, “What does our plan to transition leaders need to be?”

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<sup>77</sup>Heath’s assessment, that succession is multiple types of conversations rather than one event, is important when approaching succession in the church. See Heath, “5 Critical Conversations in Succession Planning.”

Table 67. The planning stage

Stage	Gen 1 Prompts	Gen 2 Prompts	Org Prompts
Planning (3-5 years before succession)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How long of a transition of leadership do I need to leave the church?</li> <li>-What are my financial needs after I leave this church?</li> <li>-Who are other leaders in my church or in my network that I can talk with about my succession?</li> <li>-What type of leader(s) is needed going forward to lead this church into the future?</li> <li>-Have I made myself replaceable?</li> <li>-What is my end date as senior leader?</li> <li>-What's next for me when I'm no longer the senior leader?</li> <li>-What is my plan for how/if I'll serve at the church after succession and has it been communicated?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Am I the type of leader that senior leaders invest in?</li> <li>-Have I had conversations with my leadership about my future and ways they see me best serving the church?</li> <li>-If internal succession is likely at my church, is my speech about the Gen 1 pastor's leadership encouraging and is my attitude about the church positive?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How is our financial strategy for the impending succession?</li> <li>-Is our org chart across all campuses clear and understandable at every level?</li> <li>-Are we content with our current ministry and campus strategies?</li> <li>-Is our church better served by an internal or external hire and have we discussed that?</li> <li>-Has our dialogue with the Gen 1 pastor about succession remained open?</li> <li>-How do we plan to regularly communicate the pastoral transition?</li> <li>-What team or teams will help us go through the succession?</li> <li>-Are the sensitive elements of the plans firm and in writing?</li> </ul>

The *transitioning* phase occurs 0-3 years before succession and focuses on the transfer of authority from the Gen 1 pastor to a future leader or leaders. By this point in time, the plans should be known, the timelines clear, and the strategy established. If the hire will be internal, the successor should be known. If the transition is external, the successor still might not be known. A clear moment that signals the change between the planning and transitioning stage is the public communication to the congregation of the Gen 1 pastor's departure and the plans moving forward.

Table 68. The transitioning stage

Stage	Gen 1 Prompts	Gen 2 Prompts	Org Prompts
Transitioning (0-3 years before succession)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Have I talked with my leadership about my financial needs and do I have it in writing?</li> <li>-What practical parts of leadership does the Gen 2 pastor need and how am I helping?</li> <li>-How is my family handling the succession?</li> <li>-Are my next steps after succession clear?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Am I learning everything I possibly can about the job that I will be stepping into?</li> <li>-Am I reaching out to other Gen 2 pastors to help me navigate the change?</li> <li>-Am I remaining humble in my approach to this transition?</li> <li>-Do I feel as if I have the clarity I need moving forward into this position or do I need more information from leadership?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Are we sticking to the timeline we created?</li> <li>-Are we sticking with the communication plan we created?</li> <li>-How is our congregation receiving the news of the succession?</li> <li>-Do our campus pastors feel connected to the process and empowered to speak into it?</li> <li>-How are we ensuring the development of our Gen 2 pastor(s)?</li> <li>-Are there staffing or ministry issues that we still need to address?</li> </ul>

The *succession* phase is the actual moment (or moments) that symbolizes the transfer of power. By this time, the leaders are known, the strategy is in place, and the transfer of authority is imminent. A church knows they have transferred from the transitioning stage to the succession stage when the tone of communication and meetings becomes much more celebratory. This phase is often finalized by a celebration service or moment where the Gen 1 leader hands off the leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 leader(s) and, at times, even provides some type of artifact or symbol to demonstrate the leadership change.

Table 69. The succession stage

Stage	Gen 1 Prompts	Gen 2 Prompts	Org Prompts
Succession (The specific authority exchange)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Are my plans for the first twelve months after my succession prepared?</li> <li>-Who in my life is helping me process the experience and prepared to help me navigate the next steps?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How am I going to encourage and bless the work of the Gen 1 pastor as I step into leadership?</li> <li>-How am I contributing to this phase being all about the Lord's work through the Gen 1 pastor?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How are we celebrating the work of the Gen 1 pastor?</li> <li>-Has our congregation been given adequate opportunities to grieve the loss of and celebrate the work of the Gen 1 pastor?</li> </ul>

The *learning* phase happens 6-12 months after succession and focuses on understanding the new norms that have emerged after succession. Gen 2 pastors are in leadership during this phase, and Gen 1 pastors are working on the next phase of their own ministry. Further, the organization is adjusting to new leaders. A lot has transpired and the key in this stage is stability. This stage becomes realized as a church when the Gen 2 leadership is now leading the staff during the week and preaching regularly.

Table 70. The learning stage

Stage	Gen 1 Prompts	Gen 2 Prompts	Org Prompts
Learning (6-12 months after Succession)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Am I staying out of the way in the church so that Gen 2 leadership is fully in charge?</li> <li>-What am I enjoying about this new phase of life?</li> <li>-How is my family adjusting to the new phase?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Am I engaging the leadership at each campus so that I can best learn about them?</li> <li>-How well am I caring for the staff during this time?</li> <li>-What aspects of the Gen 1 pastor's leadership can I continue for the sake of stability?</li> <li>-How am I praising the work that I have inherited?</li> <li>-In the busyness of the succession, have I neglected my spiritual growth?</li> <li>-How regularly am I praying for and seeking the future vision of the church?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Did we keep our succession strategy from start to finish?</li> <li>-Are we properly supporting the Gen 2 leadership?</li> <li>-Are we sure that our church and staff are avoiding comparisons between the generations of leadership?</li> <li>-Have we maintained the appropriate contact with the Gen 1 pastor?</li> </ul>

The *adjusting* phase happens one or more years out from succession and focuses on organizational shifts that occur post-succession. Ideally, Gen 2 pastors have taken the appropriate time to learn the culture and the people. Irrespective of whether Gen 2 leadership was internal or external, some aspects and demands of leadership are only known when one gets into the position of senior leader. Thus, even the most well-mentored Gen 2 pastor must learn what it is like to sit in the seat of senior leader.

Table 71. The adjusting stage

Stage	Gen 1 Prompts	Gen 2 Prompts	Org Prompts
Adjusting (12+ months after succession)	<p>-How have I adjusted to no longer serving as senior leader of the church?</p> <p>-How have I been able to celebrate the new leadership and work of the church?</p> <p>-Am I living out the plans that my leadership and I agreed to?</p>	<p>-Do I have enough trust from the staff to implement potential changes?</p> <p>-Do I have enough trust from the congregation to implement potential changes?</p> <p>-How am I ensuring, even with change, that I am building on a firm foundation instead of destroying a previous foundation?</p> <p>-How can I still learn from and seek mentoring from the Gen 1 pastor?</p>	<p>-Has succession impacted the measurements we saw as important in our preparing stage?</p> <p>-Does our Gen 2 leadership feel supported in their new role?</p> <p>-Are there areas of ministry that we have yet to address that are hindering the growth of our Gen 2 pastor(s)?</p>

The above roadmap prompts can be used in multiple environments—retreats, staff meetings, mentoring meetings, personal times of reflection, etc.—and at multiple times throughout the succession. Pastors and leaders can use these prompts to answer important questions that, while not ensuring success, can mitigate against potential pitfalls. These prompts will help cover some common blind spots in succession and keep difficult or tenuous conversations with the right people and at the right time. Summarily, with the right heart, the right timeline, the right conversations, and the right focus, pastors can better hand off leadership to a new generation.



## **Limitations of the Research Design**

This exploratory design exists to help multisite churches better understand the succession phenomenon as it pertains to the first generation of multisite succession. Little research has been done in this area and, thus, research limitations get exposed throughout the process. The limitations of this research design and its results break down into two large groups: (1) methodological limitations and (2) personal limitations.<sup>78</sup>

### **Methodological Limitations**

The methodological limitations of this project revolve around the population size, the prior-known research in the subject, the survey instrument, the respondent perspective, and the self-reported data. First, as stated in the weaknesses of the study, the population size was small. While some data (such as average difference between first and second generation pastors) reflected larger research, 21 churches and their requisite data does not create a large sample size. The fact that 21 churches consented and completed the study is positive, but a larger sample would allow for greater reliability of the findings. Second, the survey instrument, even after vetting by experts, could be strengthened. The succession stories do not all have responses that can be easily checked off in a survey. Some pastors needed to give nuance to their specific succession. The data found will help future studies, but survey data used to understand succession will have limitations in general because it tries to quantify that which is unique to an individual church. Third, respondents needed to have a clear vantage point of the succession, but the data itself represents different leaders' perspectives. However, Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors might report the same data differently—especially qualitatively. Finally, the metric data presented in the survey was self-reported. No mechanisms were put in place to verify metric data presented.

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<sup>78</sup>Categories for limitations came from USC Libraries, "Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper: Limitations of the Study," accessed January 11, 2018, <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/limitations>.

## **Personal Limitations**

The personal limitations of this study focused on researcher and respondent timing, financial resources, and access to population. First, the timing of the project limited the findings. Phase 1's survey creation started in mid-2016, and experts began to interact with the survey in the spring of 2017. By the time phase 1's survey was ready to launch in the fall of 2017, there was a short window of time before churches would stop responding to requests. Phase 2 occurred in November and December of 2017, which likely limited the expert interaction. Delphi participation was consistent in each phase (11 panelists in round 1, and 10 panelists in rounds 2 and 3), but experts did not desire to respond beyond what was absolutely necessary. Second, there were financial limitations. Phase 1 churches were offered no incentive for participating. Phase 2 panelists were offered \$75 for participation, but those resources were limited. Finally, researcher access was a limitation. Hundreds of church leaders received an email from someone they did not know requesting sensitive information about a delicate process. Twenty-one churches agreed to participate, which itself is an encouragement. At the same time, churches that did not participate in the study might have been more inclined had they actually known the person requesting information.

## **Areas for Further Research**

Because of the limitations, this study reveals multiple areas of future succession research. While many potential areas of research exist, four areas lend themselves to future—and potentially stronger—research into multisite: (1) greater longitudinal work on multisite churches, (2) case studies of specific multisite churches, (3) analysis of churches that had campus changes, and (4) comparisons of single-site and multisite succession. These studies would likely best serve qualitative researchers interested in interviews, case studies, and other types of personal interactions with churches and leaders.

### **Longitudinal Work on the Churches in this Study**

Timing was a weakness in this study. Some churches were only a few months out from succession; other churches were years out from succession. Some churches in this study were already thinking about second to third generation succession, and some churches were still recovering from the first succession. Some churches grew numerically in the years after succession and others did not. It is hard to pinpoint any one reason that may have happened. Thus, follow-up longitudinal studies on the 21 churches surveyed would aid in further understanding how succession impacts multisite churches. For example, seeing how churches were impacted by succession at the three-, five-, and ten-year mark might better position researchers to understand the impact of succession and how new pastors lead their churches.

### **Case Studies of Specific Churches**

As I worked through the snowball sampling in phase 1, numerous churches told me stories of their succession. One church started its succession plan as a single-site church and then it added a campus. This addition of a campus added to the complexity of succession. Some churches used video venue at succession and others used live teaching. This dissertation only scratched the surface of how succession happened. Deeper research into these churches and how they executed their succession—elements such as communication strategies, sermons used in succession, personal testimonies from staff, and mistakes made—can provide a fuller picture of succession and add to the body of research.

### **Analysis of Churches That Had Campus Changes**

Only one church in this study ceased multisite shortly after its succession. Other churches added campuses and others closed campuses. The motivations might have been practical, financial, theological, or myriad others. Looking at churches that went through succession and then had campus changes could better help multisite practitioners understand succession specifically in a multisite church.

## Comparison of Single Site and Multisite

Finally, and most readers will be able to observe quickly, this research revealed numerous similarities between multisite and single-site succession. The methodology of the Delphi and survey might have contributed to these similarities. Deeper comparisons of the succession strategy at multisite and single-site churches could expose unique nuances of each church type. These comparisons could happen through round table discussions of pastors, interviews of unique churches and experiences, etc. The goal of this would be to determine what, precisely, needs to be considered when approaching succession in each environment.

## Conclusion

If one reads through the footnotes of this study, he or she quickly realizes that this research has been compiled over several years. Even over those years, the landscape of multisite has changed dramatically. Since starting this project, two influential churches—The Village Church in Texas and Redeemer Presbyterian in New York—have either communicated their intention to cease their multisite model or have already done so.<sup>79</sup> Other church leaders, such as Bill Hybels at Willow, have opted to hand the baton off to a team of lead pastors.<sup>80</sup> Along with these, numerous other churches have either started the early process of their succession plans or have communicated their plans to the congregation.

The research on the pages of this dissertation is but a small offering to help multisite churches and their leaders better navigate succession. To understand succession

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<sup>79</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “February 26 Announcement,” accessed December 31, 2017, [https://www.redeemer.com/r/february\\_26\\_announcement](https://www.redeemer.com/r/february_26_announcement); Kate Shellnutt, “Matt Chandler’s Village Church Ends Multisite Era,” accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/matt-chandler-village-church-end-multisite-campuses-dfw.html>; The Village Church, “Multiply,” accessed October 16, 2017, <http://multiply.thevillagechurch.net>. It should be noted that Redeemer was executing a plan that was put in place in the late 1990s, see Redeemer Presbyterian Church, *A Vision for a Renewed City*.

<sup>80</sup>Willow Creek Community Church, “Willow Creek Succession Update.”

in multisite churches, the study implemented a two-phase sequential methodology—with phenomenological survey research in phase 1 and the Delphi method in phase 2. By looking back to what happened in phase 1 and then examining best practices in phase 2, churches are provided with better tools to navigate succession. Succession topics are difficult to discuss, but how leaders finish their ministry will often determine how they are remembered. This legacy does not apply simply to their pastorates but also to the world's understanding of Christ's church and her leaders. Pastors who want to care well for Christ's church must consider not just the church they lead but also the church others will lead after them.

## APPENDIX 1

### EXPERT PANEL SURVEY CONTACT

[Participant]:

My name is Hans Googer. I currently pastor at a multisite church (The Chapel in Baton Rouge, LA) and am also a PhD student at Southern Seminary. We have spoken previously about you helping with my dissertation research and the time has come to begin that process. *I am requesting 20-25 minutes of your time to evaluate a survey that will go out to all willing multisite churches having undergone first generation senior pastor succession.* This evaluation will be the first round of what will likely be two to three of honing the survey.

My dissertation is entitled *Senior Pastor Succession in Multisite Churches: A Mixed Methods Study*. The first phase of research involves building a survey for multisite churches that have undergone succession from their first generation pastor.

You are getting this email because you meet at least one of the following six requirements for being an expert panelist and helping to hone the survey:

1. Researchers who have published in the field of pastoral succession.
2. Researchers who have published in the field of the multisite church.
3. Senior pastors who led their large single-site church (2,000 or more in average weekly attendance at the time of succession) or their multisite church through the succession process.
4. Pastors who are serving as the generation 1 pastor of a multisite church and have held that position for a minimum of ten years.
5. Persons who have served as consultants for multisite churches going through pastoral succession planning.
6. Persons who are or have served on the governing board of a multisite church with a first generation multisite leader for a minimum of five years.

You will soon be receiving a link to a spreadsheet that includes a draft of the survey. I am asking you to (1) look at the survey, (2) give a value (of one to four) on each item within the survey, and (3) add any comments you desire. Please fill this out at your earliest convenience.

After all panelists have filled out the survey, I will return the results and you can see how your answers compared to the other panelists. I'll then give instructions on round two, which will be even simpler than round one.

I look forward to working with you and for helping multisite churches multiply in a healthy manner for many generations.

Hans Googer

PS—If circumstances have changed and you are unable to help with this portion of the research, please let me know.

## APPENDIX 2

### MULTISITE PASTOR SUCCESSION SURVEY

**Note:** This survey was built into SurveyMonkey software. I will represent it here as accurately as possible.

#### **SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS**

The following survey will be used to better understand the phenomenon of senior/lead pastor succession within multisite churches. Your participation goes a long way in helping future churches transition well.

The survey contains a total of 46 items (largely multiple choice) and is best filled out in one sitting (you can always leave a question you are unsure of blank and the surveyor can follow up to get the answer). Questions were written to be able to be answered quickly, but some questions require some data. You can stop the survey after completing any section and resume through the link in your email.

In order to take the survey effectively, having the following information would be helpful but not required:

- The year your church was founded
- The year your church went multisite
- The year your church underwent pastoral succession
- The age of the Gen 1 pastor and age/ages of the Gen 2 pastor/pastors
- The below information would be helpful to input when you take the survey, but you will also have the opportunity to give the name of a church administrator that the surveyor can follow up with:
  - Total yearly baptisms (from all campuses) for the three years leading up to succession and the three years after succession (or as many years as available up to three)
  - Average weekly worship attendance (from all campuses) for the three years leading up to succession and the three years after succession (or as many years as available up to three)
  - Total general offering (actual giving, not projected giving) from all campuses for the three years leading up to succession and the three years after succession (or as many years as available up to three)

As a reminder, responses will be reported anonymously. The only identifying information reported will be what churches participated in the survey and the names of the Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors (all publicly available).

**IMPORTANT: The survey will save your responses once you move to the next page. Thus, you can finish a section, select "Next" to bring you to the next page, and return to the survey at another time through the link emailed to you. However, if you stop short of completing a section and click "Next," the responses for that page will be lost.**



## TERMINOLOGY

1. Autonomous Church: A church that is self-governing and self-sustaining.
2. Generation/Gen 1 Pastor: The pastor who was the senior leader at the time the church became multisite.
3. Generation/Gen 2 Pastor(s): The pastor (or pastors, if leadership was handed from one pastor to a team) who took over as senior leader after the Gen 1 pastor handed over leadership.
4. Geographic Campuses: Facilities in a geographic locale where the church meets for worship and (potentially) other ministry activity and/or offices.
5. Governing Board: The group entrusted with the overall direction of the church in a legal capacity. Common boards might be called the elders, the administrative board, or the executive council.
6. Multisite Church: One church, meeting in multiple geographic locations—different locations in the same region, or, in some instances, different cities, states, or nations.
7. Senior Leadership Team: A group of staff members charged with implementing the overall direction of the church under the authority of the governing board.
8. Succession: The intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another.
9. Succession Plan: The agreed-upon elements that will go into the Gen 1 pastor transferring leadership to the Gen 2 pastor(s).

**As a reminder:** This survey must be filled out by someone familiar with the succession process. By continuing, you confirm that you meet at least one of the following qualifications:

- You served as the Gen 1 pastor of the church
- You serve as the Gen 2 pastor of the church (or part of the pastoral team in the case that the Gen 1 pastor transitioned leadership to a team of pastors)
- You serve/served on the senior leadership team of the church and are familiar with your church's succession process
- You serve/served on the governing board through the succession and are familiar with your church's succession process

**Part 1 covers basic information on you (contact info) and the church.** Helpful things to know for Part 1 include the year the church was founded, the year the church went multisite, and the year the church completed succession. Click "Next" to continue.

### **Part 1: Survey Respondent and Demographic Information**

This page provides the essential information about you and about your church.

1. Survey contact: (Name, email, and phone number)
2. What is your relationship to the church? (Select most appropriate)
  - Gen 1 pastor
  - Gen 2 pastor (or one of the Gen 2 pastors)
  - Senior leadership team member
  - Governing board member
3. Church name and central offices of the church (City, State):
4. Year the church was founded:

5. Year the church went multisite:
6. Year succession took place:
7. If applicable, please give the church's denominational affiliation (Foursquare, United Methodist, SBC, etc.):
8. If applicable, please list any of the church's network affiliations (Acts 29, New Thing Network, etc.).

**Thank you for completing Part 1!** Part 2 looks at pre-succession information. Helpful data to have on hand would be the tenure (in years) of the Gen 1 pastor. **Reminder: click "Next" to save your responses to Part 1.**

### **Part 2: Pre-Succession Information**

This page helps explain aspects of your church prior to succession.

9. At the time of succession, how many geographic campuses did the church have? [Answer will be a drop down of 2 to 15+]
10. At the time of succession, geographic campuses were: (Check most applicable)
  - Located within a driving distance of 30 minutes or less of each other
  - Located within a driving distance of 60 minutes or less of each other
  - Located within a driving distance of 90 minutes or less of each other
  - Located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but throughout the same state
  - Located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but throughout the same state and neighboring states
  - Located beyond 90 minutes of each other, but located throughout the same geographic region (Northwest, Southeast, etc.)
  - Other (please explain)
11. Was the Gen 1 pastor also the founding pastor of the church?
  - Yes
  - No
12. How long did the Gen 1 pastor serve as senior leader before succession to the Gen 2 pastor? [Drop down of 1-50 years]
13. The majority of sermon delivery at the time of succession was:
  - One pastor rotating to different locations on a Sunday to preach in person.
  - In-person teaching at all campuses of the same sermon idea/text by campus or teaching pastors.
  - In-person teaching at all campuses of varied idea/text by campus or teaching pastors.
  - Video (live stream or pre-recorded) of a pastor at one campus to all other campuses
  - Hybrid model of video at some campuses and live teaching at other campuses
  - Other, please explain

14. At time of succession, how many total weekend worship services did the church hold throughout its geographical locations?  
[Answer will be a drop down of 1-20+]
15. Prior to succession, had the church planted autonomous churches in any of the following ways? (Check all that apply)
- The church directly sponsored church-planting by sending leaders and money to start new churches
  - The church “spun off” one or more of its campuses into autonomous churches, while still remaining multisite
  - The church indirectly supported new churches through denominational or network giving
  - The church did not participate in church-planting
  - Other (please explain)

**Thank you for completing Part 2!** Part 3 asks for information about the succession process. Good information to have on hand would be knowing who initiated the conversation about succession, the age of the Gen 1 and the Gen 2 pastors at the completion of the succession process, and the total number of worship services at all campuses at the time of succession. **Reminder: click "Next" to save your responses to Part 2.**

### **Part 3: Succession Process Information**

This page gets at the heart of the survey—what happened during the succession process?

16. Who initiated the conversation of succession?
- The Gen 1 pastor initiated the conversation with church leadership (senior staff or governing board)
  - Church leadership (senior staff or governing board) initiated the conversation with the Gen 1 pastor
  - Other (please explain)
17. From start to finish, how long after initiating the topic of the Gen 1 pastor’s succession did the succession process take?
- 0-6 months
  - 6-12 months
  - 12-24 months
  - 24-48 months
  - More than 48 months
18. What were the contributing factors to initiating the succession conversation? (Check all that apply)
- Age of the Gen 1 pastor required consideration of the next senior leader
  - Health of the Gen 1 pastor required consideration of the next senior leader
  - Gen 1 pastor wanted to pursue different ministry outside the church
  - Gen 1 pastor desired to transition leadership while the church was in a period of positive growth
  - Governing board desired to pursue a new direction for the church.
  - Other, please explain

19. Once the church committed to implement pastoral succession, which people or groups were involved in developing the succession plan? (Check all that apply)
- The Gen 1 pastor developed the plan and presented it to the governing board for feedback and modification
  - The governing board developed the plan and presented it to the Gen 1 pastor for feedback and modification
  - The Gen 1 pastor developed the plan entirely
  - The governing board developed the plan entirely
  - The pastor and governing board worked together to develop the plan.
  - Other, please explain
20. Did the church use the services of a consulting firm to help develop the succession plan?
- Yes
  - No
21. To whom did the church leadership first communicate the succession plan once it was developed?
- The church staff
  - Lay leaders in the congregation
  - The entire congregation
  - Other (please explain)
22. At the time the succession plan was communicated to the congregation, who communicated it?
- The Gen 1 pastor
  - A member or members of the governing board
  - Both the Gen 1 pastor and a member or members of the governing board
  - Other (please explain)
23. How did the church search for a Gen 2 pastor (or pastors)? (Check all that apply)
- The church already knew who the Gen 2 pastor would be when it developed the plan
  - The church already had a list of viable candidates it wanted to pursue
  - The church implemented a broad external search for a new pastoral candidate
  - The church contracted with a search group to conduct a search
  - The church only searched for qualified pastors from within the church staff
  - Other, please explain
24. The Gen 2 pastor was/Gen 2 pastors were:
- An external hire, found from outside the church staff
  - An internal hire, found from inside the church staff
  - Other (please explain)

25. Did the Gen 2 pastor have a familial relation to the Gen 1 pastor?
- No
  - Yes, (if so, please explain relation)
26. What role did the Gen 2 pastor(s) serve previously? (In the case of succession to a team of pastors, please select "other" and list the previous roles.)
- Campus pastor at the Gen 1 pastor's church
  - Campus pastor at another multisite church
  - Executive pastor at the Gen 1 pastor's church
  - Executive pastor at another multisite church
  - Senior pastor at a another multisite church
  - Senior pastor at a single-site church
  - Other, please explain
27. Once the Gen 2 pastor(s) was/were identified, did he/she/they serve on the same staff with the Gen 1 pastor for a season of mentoring before completing the succession process?
- Yes
  - No
28. If yes, how long from the identification of the Gen 2 pastor(s) to the completion of the succession process did the Gen 1 pastor mentor the Gen 2 pastor(s)?
- 0-6 months
  - 6-12 months
  - 12-24 months
  - 24-36 months
  - 36 or more months
29. What was the age of the Gen 1 pastor at the completion of the succession process?
30. What was/were the age(s) of the Gen 2 pastor(s) at the completion of the succession process?

**Thank you for completing Part 3!** Part 4 asks for information about post-succession arrangements. Helpful information to have on hand would be how the Gen 1 pastor has engaged in church life since succession, including potential compensation arrangements post-succession (not hard numbers, but the church's general approach). **Reminder: click "Next" to save your responses to Part 3.**

#### **Part 4: Post-Succession Information**

This section looks at some of the changes that may have taken place at the church since succession.

31. How much time has passed since the original succession from the Gen 1 pastor to the Gen 2 pastor(s)?
  - 12 months or less
  - 1-3 years
  - 3-5 years
  - 5-10 years
  - 10 or more years
32. Is/are the Gen 2 pastor(s) still the primary leader(s) of the church?
  - Yes
  - No (if not, which generation pastor is currently leading?)
33. Since the original succession, have any of the following occurred? (Check all that apply)
  - The church has changed its mission or vision statement
  - The church has changed its name
  - The church has made significant changes to its leadership structure
  - The church has changed its governing structure
  - The church has changed its sermon delivery method
  - Other, please explain
34. Since the original succession, what has happened to your campuses? (Check all that apply)
  - We have the same number of campuses as before
  - We have added campuses
  - We have closed down campuses
  - We have spun-off campuses into autonomous churches
35. Since the original succession, has the church planted autonomous churches that were not previously campuses of the church?
  - Yes
  - No
36. Since the original succession, the majority of sermon delivery is:
  - One pastor rotating to different locations on a Sunday to preach in-person.
  - In-person teaching at all campuses of the same sermon idea/text by campus or teaching pastors.
  - In-person teaching at all campuses of varied idea/text by campus or teaching pastors.
  - Video (live stream or pre-recorded) of a pastor at one campus to all other campuses
  - Hybrid model of video at some campuses and live teaching at other campuses
  - Other, please explain

37. How has the Gen 1 pastor participated in the church since the succession?

- Has remained at church on paid staff
- Has remained at church as a congregant (unpaid)
- Left for a period of time but has returned on paid staff
- Left for a period of time but has returned as a congregant (unpaid)
- Has not attended the church regularly since succession
- Other, please explain

38. If the Gen 1 pastor is currently at the church (paid or unpaid), do any of the following apply?

- Gen 1 pastor preaches occasionally in worship services
- Gen 1 pastor participates in staff meetings
- Gen 1 pastor leads in a ministry area as paid staff
- Gen 1 pastor leads in a ministry area as unpaid congregant
- Other examples different from above (please explain)

39. Please briefly explain any type of compensation arrangement given to the Gen 1 pastor or Gen 1 pastor's family upon succession.

**Thanks for finishing Part 4!** Part 5 is the most data-intensive part of the survey, as it asks for pre- and post-succession metrics leading up to and coming out of the succession. The surveyor has previously sent you a list of that data and a spreadsheet that could've previously been filled out to make completion simple. You will also have the opportunity to put the name of a staff member who the surveyor can contact so that you can move on to Part 6 (the last part). **Reminder: click "Next" to save your responses to Part 4.**

#### **Part 5: Pre- and Post-Succession Metrics**

This page takes a look at some of the most significant numerical information that churches examine. "Succession Year" is the calendar year that the succession happened. Please provide data as far past succession as possible, but not past three years.

40. The below information requires knowledge of some church metrics from several years. If you are currently unable to provide this information for the survey, please list the name of a church administrator or contact who would have access to the information and the surveyor will follow up with him or her. You can then select "Next" to move on to Part 6. [Name, Role at Church, Email Address, Phone Number]

41. Please provide yearly baptisms from all geographic campuses the three calendar years leading up to succession, the calendar year of succession, and the three calendar years following. **Please put the number without commas.**

Succession Year -3	
Succession Year -2	
Succession Year -1	
Succession Year	
Succession Year +1	
Succession Year +2	
Succession Year +3	

42. Please provide average weekly worship attendance from all geographic campuses the three calendar years leading up to succession, the calendar year of succession, and the three calendar years following. Please put the number without commas.

Succession Year -3	
Succession Year -2	
Succession Year -1	
Succession Year	
Succession Year +1	
Succession Year +2	
Succession Year +3	

43. Please provide the total yearly general offering (actual giving, not projected giving) from all geographic campuses the three calendar years leading up to succession, the calendar year of succession, and the three calendar years following.

Succession Year -3	
Succession Year -2	
Succession Year -1	
Succession Year	
Succession Year +1	
Succession Year +2	
Succession Year +3	

**Thanks for finishing Part 5!** Part 6 asks three questions about lessons learned from the succession. **Reminder: click "Next" to save your responses to Part 5.**

### **Part 6: Lessons Learned**

Thank you for making it this far. The last three questions ask you to reflect on your experience and provide some of your thoughts on the succession process at your church. For these questions, consider things like the communication plan, the succession timeline, the spiritual preparation, and the process of finding a successor. Thinking back, what was done well, what was done poorly, what would you want to replicate, etc.?

44. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the succession process on a scale of 1-10 (1 being highly ineffective, 10 being highly effective)?
45. Now that the original succession process is complete, what elements of your church's succession process would you keep?
46. Now that the original succession process is complete, what elements of your church's succession process would you do differently, if any?

**Thank you for completing the multisite pastoral succession survey!** The ultimate hope is that this survey helps other multisite leaders better pass the baton to future generations. Your experiences are a huge help!

**Please select "Done" to finish this survey.**



## APPENDIX 3

### SNOWBALL SAMPLING REQUEST

[Participant]:<sup>1</sup>

My name is Hans Googer. I currently pastor at a multisite church (The Chapel in Baton Rouge, LA), am also a PhD student at Southern Seminary, and am hoping that you can help me out.

My dissertation is titled *Senior Pastor Succession in Multisite Churches: A Mixed Methods Study*. The first phase of research involved a census of multisite churches that have undergone succession from their first generation pastor (either the founding pastor or the pastor who was leading at the time the church went multisite). However, I need some help to get that list of churches.

That's where you come in.

*Would you mind emailing me back the names of any multisite churches that, as far as you are aware, have gone through first to second generation senior/lead pastor succession? I am defining "succession" the same way Warren Bird and William Vanderbloemen do in their book, *Next*. They define succession as "the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another" (*Next*, 10).*

Churches that fit this definition would include:

- Bethlehem Baptist in Minneapolis (John Piper to Jason Meyer)
- North Way Christian Community in Pittsburgh (Jay Passavant to Scott Stevens)
- Bethany in Baton Rouge (Larry Stockstill to Jonathan Stockstill)
- Community Bible Church in San Antonio (Robert Emmitt to Ed Newton)

If you know of any churches like this, would you please reply back and let me know? I would like this list to be completely thorough.

I look forward to hearing back from you,

Hans Googer

PS— Please let me know if there is anything I can clarify in the above request. Also, feel free to forward this request to anyone else you may know who could answer it.

---

<sup>1</sup>Personal identification and minor edits were made in communication to better connect with and/or identify myself to recipients.

## APPENDIX 4

### SURVEY PARTICIPATION EMAIL

[Participant]:<sup>1</sup>

The Multisite Pastoral Succession Survey is ready to launch. Before I can implement the survey, I need to have consent from the participating church.

Would you mind reading through the attached document and filling it in if you are still willing for your church to participate in the survey? The attached PDF is fillable, so you should be able to complete it quickly. As an FYI, the survey needs to be completed by one of the following people at the church:

- The Gen 1 pastor of the church
- The Gen 2 pastor of the church (or part of the pastoral team in the case that the Gen 1 pastor transitioned leadership to a team of pastors)
- Someone who serves or served on the senior leadership team of the church and is familiar with your church's succession process
- Someone who serves or served governing board through the succession and is familiar with your church's succession process

Once you **fill out the form and email it back to me**, I will start the process of survey implementation.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Hans

[Phone number removed]

---

<sup>1</sup>Personal identification and minor edits were made in communication to better connect with and/or identify myself to recipients.

## APPENDIX 5

### DISSERTATION STUDY PARTICIPATION FORM

#### **Instructions:**

1. Read the “Explanation of Research.”
2. Identify agreement or non-agreement to participate in the study.
3. Electronically fill out “Church Representative” information.

#### **Explanation of Research:**

The research in which you are about to participate (via survey) is designed to explore the phenomenon of senior pastor succession within the multisite church. Hans Christopher Googer of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is conducting this research in order to fulfill part of his PhD dissertation requirements.

The dissertation will acknowledge (in the appendices) churches that participated in the study. However, any personal or identifying information that you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and, at no time, will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses. The only identifying information that will be reported in the dissertation is the name and central office location of the church and the names of pastors who underwent the succession (information that is all publicly accessible). However, any information about the unique succession experience will not be identified with your church.

*Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

#### **Agreement**

By your completion of this form and agreement to participate in this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree for my church to participate in this survey

I do not agree for my church to participate in this survey

#### **Church Representative**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Representing: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 6  
SUCCESSION LIST

Table A1. Succession list

Church <sup>1</sup>	Denomination	Central Offices	State	Gen 1 Pastor	Gen 2 Pastor(s)	Type	Family Relationship	In Survey
Anastasia Baptist Church	SBC	St. Augustine	FL	Ronald Moore	Walter West	Internal	*	*
Bethany	Non-Denom	Baton Rouge	LA	Larry Stockstill	Jonathan Stockstill	Internal	*	
Bethany UMC	UMC	Wayne	NJ	Paul D. Chang	James Lee	Internal		
Bethel	CBNW	Richland	WA	Dave Bechtel	James Armstrong	External		*
Bethlehem Baptist Church	Converge	Minneapolis	MN	John Piper	Jason Meyer	Internal		*
CedarCreek.tv	Non-Denom	Toledo/ Perrysburg	OH	Lee Powell	Ben Snyder	Internal		*
Christ Church of the Valley	Non-Denom	Phoenix	AZ	Don Wilson	Ashley Wooldridge	Internal		
Christ Fellowship Church	Non-Denom	Palm Beach	FL	Tom Mullins	Todd Mullins	Internal	*	
Church on the Move	Non-Denom	Tulsa	OK	Willie George	Whitney George	Internal	*	
Community Bible Church	Non-Denom	San Antonio	TX	Robert Emmitt	Ed Newton	External		*
Compass Christian Church	Non-Denom	Chandler	AZ	Roger Storms	Brian Jobe	External		
Cornerstone	SBC	Ames	IA	Troy Nesbitt	Jeff Dodge	Internal		*
EastLake Church	Non-Denom	Chula Vista	CA	Mike Meeks	James Grogan	Internal		*
Fielder Church	SBC	Arlington	TX	Gary Smith	Jason Paredes	Internal		*
First UMC Houston	UMC	Houston	TX	Bill Hinson	Steve Wende	External		
Ginghamsburg UMC	UMC	Tipp City	OH	Michael Slaughter	Chris Heckaman	Internal		
Grace Capital Church	Foursquare	Pembroke	NH	Peter Bonanno	Mark Warren	Internal		*
Hickory Grove Baptist Church	SBC	Charlotte	NC	Joe Brown	Clint Pressley	Internal		*

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<sup>1</sup>While preparing the research in this dissertation and interacting with churches and consultants, a 36th church, McLean Bible Church, with campuses in VA, MD, and Washington DC, completed their succession. Lon Solomon handed leadership off to two pastors. David Platt became the teaching pastor and Dale Sutherland became the lead pastor. This succession is another example of one leader handing leadership off to a team of leaders.

Table A1 continued

Hosanna! Church	Lutheran	Lakeville	MN	Bill Bohline	Ryan Alexander	Internal		*
Jubilee Christian Church	Non-Denom	Mattapan	MA	Gideon Thompson	Matthew Thompson	Internal	*	
Lakes Area Vineyard	Vineyard	Detroit Lakes	MN	Bryan Ornisst	Troy Easton	Internal		*
Lenexa Baptist Church	SBC	Lenexa	KS	Steve Dighton	Chad McDonald	Internal		
Mountain Lake Church	Non-Denom	Atlanta	GA	Shawn Lovejoy	Chris Emmitt	External		
North Way Christian Community	Non-Denom	Wexford	PA	Jay Passavant	Scott Stevens	Internal		*
Orchard Hill Church	Reformed Church in America	Cedar Falls	IA	Dave Bartlett	Jeff Mickey, Doug Tensen, Brian Steenhoek	Internal		*
Redemption Church	Non-Denom	Gilbert	AZ	Tom Shrader	Tyler Johnson	Internal	*	*
Seacoast Church	Non-Denom	Charleston	SC	Gregg Surratt	Josh Surratt	Internal	*	
Shepherd of the Hills UMC	UMC	Mission Viejo	CA	Craig Brown	Karl Stuckenberg	External		
Sonrise Church	UMC	Fort Wayne	IN	Stan Buck	Scott Pattison	External		*
Stone Creek Church	AG	Urbana	IL	Gary Grogan	Ricky Spindler	Internal		*
The Chapel	Non-Denom	Baton Rouge	LA	Dennis Eenigenburg	Kevin McKee	Internal		*
The Chapel	Non-Denom	Sandusky/Norwalk	OH	Bill Schroder	Eric Lapta, Todd Nielsen	Internal		
Walnut Hill Community Church	Non-Denom	Bethel	CT	Clive Carter	Brian Mowrey, Craig Mowrey, Adam DePasquale	Internal		*
Westside Church	Foursquare	Bend	OR	Ken Johnson	Steve Mickel	Internal		*
Woodbury Lutheran Church	Lutheran	Woodbury	MN	Dean Nadasdy	Tom Pfothhauer	Internal		*

Note: Denominational information comes from (1) the surveys received or (2) internet searching and church website investigation. AG = Assemblies of God, CBNW = Conservative Baptist Northwest, SBC = Southern Baptist Convention, UMC = United Methodist Church.

## APPENDIX 7

### DELPHI OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

#### Gen 1 Practices

1. At what point in ministry should a Gen 1 Pastor begin considering succession to a Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors)?
2. How should Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for their eventual succession?
3. With whom should a Gen 1 Pastor be interacting with to develop a succession plan?
4. How should a Gen 1 Pastor help prepare the Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors) for leadership?
5. Where should a Gen 1 Pastor focus after authority has been handed off to the second generation of leadership?

#### Gen 2 Practices

6. In what ways should a Gen 2 Pastor prepare personally to step into the role of successor?
7. Where should a Gen 2 Pastor focus in the first twelve months after assuming leadership?
8. How should the Gen 2 Pastor of a multisite church honor the legacy of the Gen 1 Pastor?

#### Organizational Practices

9. How should a multisite church prepare itself organizationally for a Gen 1 pastoral succession?
10. How should a multisite church keep its staff informed during the succession process?
11. How should a multisite church keep the congregation informed during the succession process?

## APPENDIX 8

### DELPHI PANEL INVITATION

Dear [Participant],

[Personal comments] Due to your unique experience within the multisite church and succession, I believe you can contribute significantly to the growing body of research on the multisite church; and I am asking for your help creating some best practices.

The first phase of research—a survey of churches having gone through succession—is almost complete.

Phase 2 of the research requires using an expert panel to project best practices for multisite churches going through pastoral succession. Due to your role as [role removed], I am asking you to be one of those panelists. Panelists must be one or more of the following:

- Someone who has served as the Gen 1 pastor at a multisite church that has gone through succession.
- Someone who has served as the Gen 2 pastor at a multisite church that has gone through succession.
- Someone who has served on the senior leadership team or governing board of a multisite church while it has gone through succession.
- Someone who has consulted multisite churches through the pastoral succession process.

*If you are interested in participating in this panel, please reply and let me know. A few things about the panel:*

- We will have between three and five email exchanges over the best practices.
- The study would start early November (first email exchange), skip over Thanksgiving, and then finish out early December.
- *Total time commitment* will be between 60-90 minutes.
- You will receive financial remuneration of \$75 for your completion of the project.

I look forward to working with you and for helping churches pursue health for many generations.

Thank you,

Hans

## APPENDIX 9

### ROUND 1 SURVEY

Survey Title: Best Practices for Multisite Succession—Round 1

PAGE 1

Consent and Instructions

Panelist Information:

- Name
- Email Address
- Phone Number

The following survey is for Hans Googer's PhD research on senior pastor succession in multisite churches. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Do you consent to take the survey?

- Yes
- No

What best describes your role within the multisite church? (Select most applicable)

- I have served as the Gen 1 Pastor at a multisite church that has gone through pastoral succession.
- I am serving or have served as the Gen 2 Pastor at a multisite church that has gone through pastoral succession.
- I am serving or have served as a governing board member OR a member of a pastoral leadership team for the duration of a generation 1 to generation 2 succession process.
- I serve as a consultant for multisite churches that have gone through the pastoral succession process.

**Aim:** The following survey will begin the process of uncovering best practices for lead pastor succession within multisite churches. On the following page, the survey asks a total of eleven questions broken up into three categories. These questions were developed from (1) an examination of succession literature, (2) a survey of multisite churches that have gone through succession, and (3) interaction with multisite church consultants.

**Instructions:** For Round 1, the survey focuses upon open-ended questions about succession.

- Please read each question carefully.
- Please respond to each question as thoroughly as you believe necessary. Feel free to write in paragraphs, bullet points, or other means that are helpful to you.



- Please be *as specific as possible* in your answers.
- Please, when able, speak to the specific nuances of the multisite church and how it affects the answers to the questions.
- When finished, please click "Done."

Please click "Next" to be brought to the survey questions.

Thank you!

PAGE 2

Open-Ended Responses

Please read each question and provide, to the best of your ability, specific best practices for each of the following areas.

### **Gen 1 Pastor Practices**

1. At what point in ministry should a Gen 1 Pastor begin considering succession to a Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors)?
2. How should Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for their eventual succession?
3. With whom should a Gen 1 Pastor be interacting with to develop a succession plan?
4. How should a Gen 1 Pastor help prepare the Gen 2 Pastor (or Pastors) for leadership?
5. Where should a Gen 1 Pastor focus after authority has been handed off to the second generation of leadership?

### **Gen 2 Practices**

6. In what ways should a Gen 2 Pastor prepare personally to step into the role of successor?
7. Where should a Gen 2 Pastor focus in the first twelve months after assuming leadership?
8. How should the Gen 2 Pastor of a multisite church honor the legacy of the Gen 1 Pastor?

### **Organizational Practices**

9. How should a multisite church prepare itself organizationally for a Gen 1 pastoral succession?
10. How should a multisite church keep its staff informed during the succession process?
11. How should a multisite church keep the congregation informed during the succession process?

## APPENDIX 10

### ROUND 2 INSTRUCTIONS AND SURVEY

Survey Title: Best Practices for Multisite Succession—Round 2

PAGE 1

#### Round 2 Survey Instructions

The work you and the other panelists have completed thus far has led to the 93 practices you will find on the following pages. (At times, practices across questions overlapped and were combined to make the list as short as possible.)

The goal of Round 2 is to find out which practices have **consensus**. Not every practice is equal, and your job in Round 2 is to provide your honest assessment as to the importance of each practice (by rating each practice on a scale of 1-4). A breakdown of the following survey:

- Page 1: Please put your name so I can categorize responses.
- Page 2: Gen 1 Practices.
- Page 3: Gen 2 Practices.
- Page 4: Organizational Practices.

Please rate each practice.

This survey should take no more than 20 minutes.

What is your name?

Please click “Next” to start the survey.

PAGE 2  
Gen 1 Practices

Please review the following practices based on their importance in going through pastoral succession in a multisite church.

1. How important are the following items when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors begin to consider succession?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).				
Realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.				
Realizing that a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists.				
Committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.				
Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.				
Considering succession by the 25th year of ministry.				
Recognizing a growing inability to connect with a younger generation.				

2. How important are the following items when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for succession?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Having plans on what ministry/life pursuits will be engaged after succession.				
Having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.				
Giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.				
Determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.				
Patiently and prayerfully looking for a Gen 2 pastor.				

Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.				
Strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities. (Example: a teaching team)				
Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.				
Setting the pace on the pre-succession relationship with the Gen 2 pastor.				
Leading their church to a reaffirmation of its core values.				

3. How important are the following items when it comes to the group(s) of people with whom Gen 1 pastors should develop a succession plan?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Employing the services of a consultant to help develop a succession plan.				
Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.				
Creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.				
Developing their plan with their spouse.				
Interacting with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.				

4. How important are the following items when it comes to how the Gen 1 pastors can help prepare Gen 2 pastors for leadership?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
If internal succession, creating a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s).				
If internal succession, walking closely with the Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.				
Sticking to the succession plan and timeline.				

Post-succession, being encouragers and counselors (when called upon).				
Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.				
Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.				
If internal succession, by becoming their friend and confidant.				
If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.				

5. How important are the following items when it comes to where Gen 1 pastors should focus *\*after\** succession has been completed?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.				
Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.				
If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.				
Coaching and mentoring leaders.				
If remaining at the church after succession, focusing on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.				
Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.				

Thanks for finishing the Gen 1 practices! The following page lists the Gen 2 practices. Click "Next" to continue.

Please review the following practices based on their importance in going through pastoral succession in a multisite church.

6. How important are the following items when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors personally prepare to step into the role of successor?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.				
Growing in humility.				
Seeking counsel from other Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors who have gone before them.				
Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.				
Focusing on spiritual disciplines.				
If internal succession, shadowing the Gen 1 pastor.				
Building relationships with people at all campuses.				
Giving attention to their family relationships.				
Reading books about transitions.				
Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.				

7. How important are the following items when it comes to where Gen 2 pastors should focus during their first twelve months after assuming leadership?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Minimizing large organizational changes.				
Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).				
Building trust with the church.				
Praying about and communicating the vision to the appropriate groups.				
Looking for places to get easy wins for the church and staff.				
Using the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.				
Giving attention to preaching.				
Providing leadership to the staff.				

Providing leadership to the board.				
Celebrating new successes of the church.				

8. How important are the following items when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors can honor the legacy of the Gen 1 pastor?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.				
If the Gen 1 pastor remains at the church, intentionally including them in appropriate areas of ministry, church celebrations, and ongoing church life.				
Ensuring the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.				
Including the Gen 1 pastor in ministry events/celebrations at the campus where Gen 1 pastor was most engaged.				
Having one-on-one meetings with the Gen 1 pastor to continue/grow the relationship.				

Thanks for finishing the Gen 2 practices! The following page lists the overall organizational practices. Click "Next" to continue.

Please review the following practices based on their importance in going through pastoral succession in a multisite church.

9. How important are the following items when it comes to how a multisite church prepares itself organizationally for pastoral succession?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.				
Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.				
Addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.				
Determining if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.				
Addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.				
Establishing an emergency succession plan.				
Ensuring that the church has a strong staff leadership team in place.				
Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.				
Working collaboratively with the Gen 1 pastor in developing the succession plan.				
Ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.				
Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.				
Ensuring succession is discussed years prior to any potential transition.				

10. How important are the following items when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its staff informed during the succession process?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Including the staff in the succession process—not for deciding, but for ownership.				
Communicating to all staff members regularly (at a set frequency) and broadly (multiple forms).				
Ensuring their staff has time to assess their future fit under Gen 2's leadership.				



If internal succession, allowing Gen 2 pastors to regularly update the staff.				
Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.				
Allowing for their staff to give feedback on the process and their personal feelings/thoughts/concerns about it.				
Utilizing the church's board to keep the staff informed and give regular updates.				
Ensuring the staff hears the right information about succession from the right people.				
Empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.				

11. How important are the following items when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its congregation informed during the succession process?

Practice	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Holding open forums for their congregation to engage leadership.				
Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.				
Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.				
Planting seeds of the need and value of succession years prior to the succession (example: through sermons).				
Utilizing the church's board to explain the process to the congregation and give regular updates.				
Utilizing the transition/succession team to send out regular communication to the congregation.				
If internal succession, letting Gen 2 pastors regularly update the congregation.				
Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.				
Utilizing small group gatherings to generate greater buy-in.				
Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.				
Providing the congregation opportunities to express their gratitude to the Gen 1 pastor.				

APPENDIX 11

ROUND 2 CONSENSUS STATEMENTS

Note: Statements are ordered by weighted average. Practices listed at the top of a table were ones with the fewest panelists out of consensus while practices at the bottom of the list had the greatest amount of panelists out of consensus.

Table A2. Question 1 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
1.01	At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).	E01	I would choose to come into consensus with this statement.
1.02	Realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.	E01	I would choose to move into consensus on this statement.
1.04	Committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.	E08	No justification given.
1.03	Realizing that a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists.	E06	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.
1.07	Recognizing a growing inability to connect with a younger generation.	E01	Not any one aspect of the Gen 1 Pastors weaknesses that should be the force behind pursuing succession. Secondly, we all have strengths and weaknesses and we are able to surround ourselves with people that are strong where we are weak, so therefore it is not any one particular deficit of a Gen 1 Pastor that should spark a succession plan.
		E04	No justification given.

Table A3. Question 2 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
2.02	Having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.	E10	No justification given.
2.04	Determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.	E06	No justification given.
2.07	Strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities. (Example: a teaching team)	E08	No justification given.
2.08	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	E08	No justification given.
2.05	Patiently and prayerfully looking for a Gen 2 pastor.	E10	No justification given.
2.03	Giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.	E05	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.
2.10	Leading their church to a reaffirmation of its core values.	E04	No justification given.
		E09	No justification given.

Table A4. Question 3 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
3.05	Interacting with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.	E10	No justification given.

Table A5. Question 4 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
4.01	If internal succession, creating a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s).	E10	No justification given.
4.05	Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.	E05	No justification given.
4.02	If internal succession, walking closely with the Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.	E01	It needs to be at the Gen 2 Pastors pursuit of the Gen 1 Pastor for mentoring, rather than the intentionality of the Gen 1 Pastor pursuing the Gen 2 Pastor. It can cause confusion for board, staff, and congregants on who is leading the church.
		E10	No justification given.
4.04	Post-succession, being encouragers and counselors (when called upon).	E05	No justification given.
		E06	No justification given.

Table A6. Question 5 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
5.02	Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.	E06	No justification given.
5.03	If remaining at the church after succession, focusing on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.	E10	No justification given.
5.04	If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.	E09	No justification given.
5.06	Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.	E09	No justification given.

Table A7. Question 6 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
6.03	Seeking counsel from other Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors who have gone before them.	E09	No justification given.
6.04	Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.	E05	No justification given.
6.05	Focusing on spiritual disciplines.	E10	No justification given.
6.08	Giving attention to their family relationships.	E05	No justification given.
6.02	Growing in humility.	E06	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.

Table A8. Question 7 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
7.05	Looking for places to get easy wins for the church and staff.	E04	No justification given.
7.06	Using the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.	E07	Use the existing staff if the culture is healthy. However, if there needs to be significant change to the culture (i.e., it's unhealthy), then you may be unable to use the existing staff to build a new culture. You can't plant new vision in bad soil.
7.07	Giving attention to preaching.	E03	No justification given.
7.01	Minimizing large organizational changes.	E05	No justification given.
		E06	No justification given.
7.10	Celebrating new successes of the church.	E03	No justification given.
		E04	No justification given.
7.04	Praying about and communicating the vision to the appropriate groups.	E03	No justification given.
		E07	Join Consensus
		E10	No justification given.

Table A9. Question 8 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
8.01	Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.	E04	No justification given.
		E07	Generally, I agree with this, but with limitations. I think both parties should agree to speak well of one another and there should be a time where honor/respect is given. However, I can also see where you could lose credibility in your leadership by spending too much time celebrating the past instead articulating vision for the future
8.02	If the Gen 1 pastor remains at the church, intentionally including them in appropriate areas of ministry, church celebrations, and ongoing church life.	E01	The Gen 2 Pastor can honor and celebrate the Gen 1 Pastor, however, the Gen 1 Pastor attendance and continued engagement with the congregation can continue to cause confusion as to who is leading the church. If the Gen 1 Pastor is asked for certain functions (funerals, weddings, baptisms) that is fine. But to continue to be present and have a role in several church functions can cause confusion.
		E06	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.

Table A10. Question 9 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
9.03	Addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.	E08	No justification given.
9.05	Addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.	E06	No justification given.
9.07	Ensuring that the church has a strong staff leadership team in place.	E08	No justification given.
9.11	Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.	E09	No justification given.
9.01	Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.	E06	No justification given.
		E08	No justification given.
9.04	Determining if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.	E06	No justification given.
		E07	I think this can be something that can be addressed down the road, tailored to the Gen 2 pastor's strengths. But I do not believe this is something that has to be immediately address. Strategy can continue until the need to change is required.
9.10	Ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.	E05	No justification given.
		E06	No justification given.

Table A11. Question 10 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
10.08	Ensuring the staff hears the right information about succession from the right people.	E09	No justification given.
10.03	Ensuring their staff has time to assess their future fit under Gen 2's leadership.	E09	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.
10.09	Empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.	E06	No justification given.
		E09	No justification given.

Table A12. Question 11 consensus statements

Number	Practice	Expert Number	Justification
11.06	Utilizing the transition/succession team to send out regular communication to the congregation.	E09	No justification given.
11.08	Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.	E05	No justification given.
11.02	Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.	E06	No justification given.
		E08	No justification given.
11.03	Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.	E08	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.
11.05	Utilizing the church's board to explain the process to the congregation and give regular updates.	E04	No justification given.
		E08	No justification given.
11.04	Planting seeds of the need and value of succession years prior to the succession (example: through sermons).	E05	No justification given.
		E08	No justification given.
		E10	No justification given.
11.09	Utilizing small group gatherings to generate greater buy-in.	E04	No justification given.
		E06	No justification given.
		E09	No justification given.



## APPENDIX 12

### ROUND 3 INSTRUCTIONS AND SURVEY

Survey Title: Best Practices for Multisite Succession—Round 3

PAGE 1

#### Round 3 Survey Instructions

The work you and the other panelists have completed thus far has led to the 76 practices finding 70% consensus amongst those who rated it (rating it 3 or 4).

The goal of Round 3 is to finalize the list of practices. You will look at the 76 practices one final time and either select "Agree" or "Disagree" when considering their importance for succession.

- Page 1: Please put your name so I can categorize responses.
- Page 2: Gen 1 Practices.
- Page 3: Gen 2 Practices.
- Page 4: Organizational Practices.
- Page 5: Payment Information.

Rather than 1-4, this time you are simply selecting "Agree" or "Disagree."

This survey should take no more than 15 minutes.

What is your name?

Please click "Next" to start the survey.

PAGE 2  
Gen 1 Practices

Please review the following practices based on their importance in going through pastoral succession in a multisite church.

1. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors begin to consider succession?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Realizing a leadership change is necessary for continued church health.		
At a minimum, considering succession no later than three to five years from retirement (or next ministry season).		
Realizing ministry passions have declined and/or shifted over time.		
Committing to consider succession long before succession conversations are demanded/required.		
Realizing that a strong group of Gen 2 leaders exists.		
Recognizing a growing inability to connect with a younger generation.		

2. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to helping Gen 1 pastors personally prepare for succession?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Having a clear plan on how they will/won't engage with the church after succession.		
Having early and regular conversations with trusted people in their lives (inside and outside the church) about succession.		
Determining their personal financial needs post-succession and communicating them to the appropriate leadership.		
Strategically developing teams of leaders with which to share essential leadership responsibilities. (Example: a teaching team)		
Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.		
Patiently and prayerfully looking for a Gen 2 pastor.		
Giving attention to the spiritual disciplines—particularly prayer.		
Leading their church to a reaffirmation of its core values.		

3. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to the group(s) of people with whom Gen 1 pastors should develop a succession plan?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Interacting with their board/governing authorities to develop a succession plan.		
Creating and working with a special transition team from the church to aid in the succession plan and process.		
Developing their plan with their spouse.		
Interacting with those who have previously gone through Gen 1 succession.		

4. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how the Gen 1 pastors can help prepare Gen 2 pastors for leadership?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Sticking to the succession plan and timeline.		
Post-succession, giving space to Gen 2 pastors and letting them lead freely.		
If internal succession, giving Gen 2 pastors exposure to the congregation prior to succession.		
If internal succession, creating a multi-phase succession process that slowly and deliberately hands off leadership responsibilities to the Gen 2 pastor(s).		
Being transparent in their communication with Gen 2 pastors about the church and what leadership in it is like.		
If internal succession, walking closely with the Gen 2 pastor(s) as a mentor throughout the succession.		
Post-succession, being encouragers and counselors (when called upon).		

5. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to where Gen 1 pastors should focus *\*after\** succession has been completed?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Attending to their next ministry endeavor, based upon giftings and experience.		
Publicly and privately supporting the continued work of the church.		
If remaining at the church after succession, focusing on areas of church ministry that will aid the success of Gen 2 pastors.		
If remaining at the church, taking a season away from the church—immediately after succession—to let the Gen 2 pastor(s) grow in leadership.		
Intentionally focusing away from the inner workings of the church.		

Thanks for finishing the Gen 1 practices! The following page lists the Gen 2 practices. Click "Next" to continue.

Please review the following practices based on their importance in going through pastoral succession in a multisite church.

6. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors personally prepare to step into the role of successor?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Taking time to learn the nuances of leading their specific church.		
Building relationships with people at all campuses.		
Assessing their emotional health and learning where they can grow.		
Seeking counsel from other Gen 1 and Gen 2 pastors who have gone before them.		
Focusing on and developing their identity in Christ rather than their function as a pastor.		
Focusing on spiritual disciplines.		
Giving attention to their family relationships.		
Growing in humility.		

7. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to where Gen 2 pastors should focus during their first twelve months after assuming leadership?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Developing strong relationships at every level of the church (board, staff, members, etc.).		
Building trust with the church.		
Providing leadership to the staff.		
Providing leadership to the board.		
Looking for places to get easy wins for the church and staff.		
Using the existing staff to build culture for the new generation of leadership.		
Giving attention to preaching.		
Minimizing large organizational changes.		
Celebrating new successes of the church.		
Praying about and communicating the vision to the appropriate groups.		

8. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how Gen 2 pastors can honor the legacy of the Gen 1 pastor?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Ensuring the church appropriately celebrates/recognizes the tenure and ministry of the Gen 1 pastor.		
Looking for regular opportunities (in public and private settings) to praise/support/bless the prior work of the Gen 1 pastor.		
If the Gen 1 pastor remains at the church, intentionally including them in appropriate areas of ministry, church celebrations, and ongoing church life.		

PAGE 4  
Organizational Practices

Please review the following practices based on their importance in going through pastoral succession in a multisite church.

9. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how a multisite church prepares itself organizationally for pastoral succession?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Developing clear lines of authority within and between campuses.		
Taking the initiative in informing staff on how to go through succession.		
Working collaboratively with the Gen 1 pastor in developing the succession plan.		
Addressing internal/staffing issues prior to succession.		
Addressing early in the process any financial components to the succession.		
Ensuring that the church has a strong staff leadership team in place.		
Visiting and learning from other multisite churches that have gone through succession.		
Establishing clear and direct communication plans that address every level of ministry.		
Determining if/how the church will continue their multisite strategy post-succession.		
Ensuring campus pastors are regularly engaged during the succession process.		

10. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its staff informed during the succession process?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Communicating to all staff members regularly (at a set frequency) and broadly (multiple forms).		
If internal succession, allowing Gen 2 pastors to regularly update the staff.		
Communicating with their staff in a way that fosters trust in the leadership and the process.		
Ensuring the staff hears the right information about succession from the right people.		
Ensuring their staff has time to assess their future fit under Gen 2's leadership.		
Empowering campus pastors to deliver some of the succession information to the campus teams.		

11. Do you agree or disagree that the following practices are valuable when it comes to how a multisite church keeps its congregation informed during the succession process?

Practice	Agree	Disagree
Ensuring a tone of thanksgiving and celebration in all communication.		
Providing the congregation opportunities to express their gratitude to the Gen 1 pastor.		
Utilizing the transition/succession team to send out regular communication to the congregation.		
Utilizing communication in the worship services at every campus.		
Letting the Gen 1 pastor lead the way in communicating to the congregation.		
Regarding timing, telling the whole congregation only after bringing all other stakeholders (board, staff, key volunteers, etc.) into the loop.		
Utilizing the church's board to explain the process to the congregation and give regular updates.		
Planting seeds of the need and value of succession years prior to the succession (example: through sermons).		
Utilizing small group gatherings to generate greater buy-in.		

You're not finished yet! The following page lets you tell me how you'd like to receive the financial compensation for participating in the study.



PAGE 5

How would you like to receive your compensation?

- PayPal
- Amazon Gift Card
- A Check in the Mail

If PayPal or Amazon, please put the associated email address below. If you would like me to mail you a check, please put the address to where you'd like it mailed.

Thank you for your contribution to the study. I will begin tabulating responses once I hear back from all panelists. I appreciate all the time and wisdom you have given. If I have any questions, I'll reach back out—and please don't hesitate to get in touch with me should you need anything!

Please select "Done" to finish this survey.

## APPENDIX 13

### SURVEY COMMUNICATION FOR SURVEYMONKEY

NOTE: This email contained a link for completing the Multisite Pastoral Succession Survey. It was generated within SurveyMonkey.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Millions of people attend a multisite church any given Sunday, and many of them are approaching a season where leadership transitions will begin. By sharing your experience, you are helping to create a resource for church leaders to draw from for years to come.

The following survey has 46 items and is written for you to be able to take in one sitting. I previously sent you a list of some of the potentially harder-to-find data and a mechanism for getting it from another member of your church staff. If you have all the necessary data, the survey should take you roughly 20 minutes to complete.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Hans Googer  
[Phone number removed]

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## ABSTRACT

### SENIOR PASTOR SUCCESSION IN MULTISITE CHURCHES: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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With its growing popularity, most church leaders believe the multisite church is not going anywhere. Regardless of one's belief about whether a multisite church meets the definition of "one church" or "multiple churches," all multisite churches must deal with the fact that their senior leaders will eventually depart. While numerous examples of single-site pastoral succession exist, there are few examples of multisite pastoral succession from which to learn.

The ultimate purpose of this research was to help multisite churches (or churches that are considering multisite) better understand and implement pastoral succession from the first generation of pastoral leadership to the second. To accomplish this goal, a two-phase sequential mixed-methods study was developed. Phase 1 of the research built a survey to better understand multisite succession, which was administered to 21 of 35 churches that were discovered through snowball sampling.

Phase 2 built upon the survey information and utilized a Delphi Panel in order to project best practices for multisite churches undergoing pastoral succession. This phase had 76 practices gain consensus after three rounds of expert feedback. The practices pertained to practices for first generation pastors, practices for second generation pastors, and practices for the organization as a whole.

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